THE GALLANT ROGUE

BURTON KLINE

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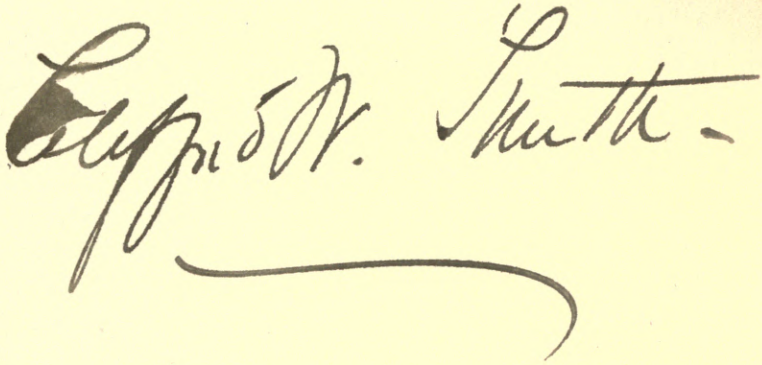

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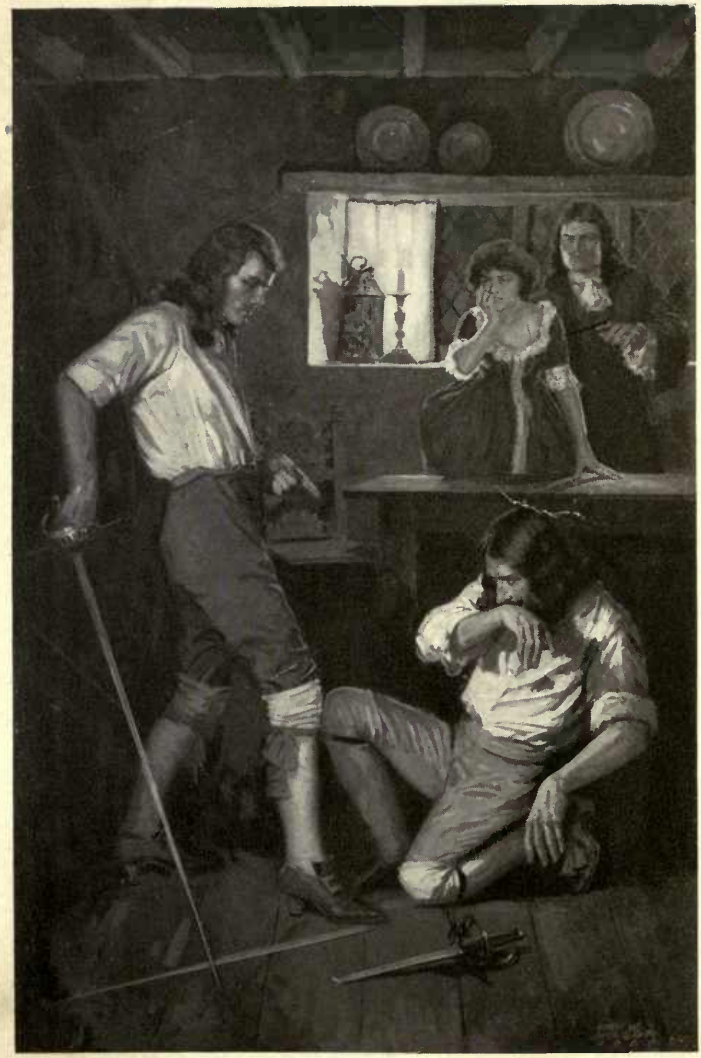

"MORBIHAN! . . . I WOULD SAY THE NOBLEMAN FORGOT HIMSELF!" FRONTISPIECE. *See page* 298.

The Gallant Rogue

By
BURTON KLINE

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
F. VAUX WILSON

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To

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW

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THE GALLANT ROGUE

The Gallant Rogue

CHAPTER I

SOMEWHAT amused at his ridiculous situation, Canardin hummed a little tune. With his dashing velvet coat tucked under one arm, and his red-heeled boots flung over his shoulder on a cord, Canardin picked his way along in the dead of night—neatly he picked his way across the roofs of Paris.

It was not often in these days of his fame and prosperity that Canardin returned in such a fashion and by such a route from masquerade or tavern. More often he bribed one of the King's guards to haul him home in one of the public carriages. But, thankful in the present emergency for practice in the past, Canardin hummed his tune and made his way across the slippery tiles with the agility and unconcern of a cat. Happily for that other sleek prowler of the moonlit paths, the cat has only gravity to fear, and the occasional stone of a mischievous boy. Canardin

was being stalked by sterner forces. Not simply the police of Paris, but the police of France were upon his track. A moment before, a squad of them had stood guard in the street before the very house he was upon, and he knew it. Knew it? Had he not paused for a low laugh at their awed remarks about him and their sage suggestions toward his capture?

With excellent reason did Canardin's taste in the everyday color of a coat run to the greenish-gray which so aptly matched the stones in the dark alleys of Paris by day; and to the waistcoat and small clothes of a rusty red, which so nicely harmonized with the tiles of its roofs by night. So Canardin hummed his little tune and crept along. The narrowest avenue of escape would suffice for a cunning which had never yet failed him. It is true that the lateness of the hour brought every minute nearer the rising of the moon; but the same lateness had sent to bed the people who might play the spy upon him if they dared.

Moreover, at that very instant Canardin descried, only a few feet ahead of him, a waterspout which led down the rear side of the house into a dark and deserted alley. It rather tickled his fancy, the idea of there adjusting one of his light

disguises and joining the provost in the street in front, as he had done more than once before, with a gracious offer of his assistance in trailing down the notorious Canardin.

In a moment his foot was on the scupper at the top of this heavy bronze drain. First testing its security, he let himself down, gripping—even choking—the pipe with his powerful hands and feeling for its joints with his feet. This was not the first time the sturdy builders of Paris, without knowing it, had befriended Canardin with such a ladder.

At the third joint in the pipe, it must be said, Canardin came to a sudden halt. For immediately below him, to one side, was a window, open and faintly lighted, which he had not been able to observe from the eaves above.

For a period Canardin clung thus in space, motionless, to make note if he had been overheard. Lowering himself by the length of another joint in the pipe, he could see that a single candle cast the light in the room. Thrust in the neck of a bottle standing on a plain deal table, it lifted its feeble rays above a litter of papers. Otherwise, except for a tumbled cot, the room was empty of furnishings, and yet to Canardin it was instantly crowded with interest.

Seated before the table, with his back to the window, was a young man, sometime writing busily and sometime pausing to sigh and dash his fingers through his hair. One other object of interest attracted the eye of Canardin. On the table, among the papers piled about, stood a bag unmistakably filled with money, for two or three shining pieces of gold had slipped through a hole in its side.

"Bah! Only a poet!" had been Canardin's first thought. "If he so much as breathes an alarm, I'll crack his neck! But no!" he quickly thought on. "The money! A poet with gold? A miser, as I live! I must have a word with Monsieur the Miser."

The police of the world might be and were at Canardin's heels, with the gibbet in plain view before him; at the sight of gold he forgot them all,—gold, that is, hoarded for no sake but its own. This was not for greed of the money, be it said, for Canardin now had plenty of that; it was rather because nothing but gold is so stoutly defended, nothing else is so pleasantly won. Canardin paused to consider. From the pipe where he clung it would cost him a second's effort to swing a stockinged foot to the window-sill; from the sill to the table where lay the money meant

two steps more. Canardin felt for one of his pistols.

Noiselessly he laid hold of the open sash and let himself in, ready for the pounce and for what consequence soever might ensue; and but for a trifling circumstance, another error of judgment might have stood to the debit of the first outlaw of France. One of Canardin's boots, swaying at his back, had knocked against the frame of the window as he let himself in, and at sound of it the young man at the table whisked about with a violent start.

This was natural enough. What was less than natural and more than strange, Canardin himself was subject to a start, and for a second stood rigid in a pose of stupefaction. Then, as a matter of course, he instantly recovered his wits and rushed forward with outstretched hand.

"Lavallais!" he cried in a low voice. "Can it be you? Good old Lavallais! My faith, but this is droll! What a circumstance!"

The young man thus addressed rose stiffly and in some bewilderment, and though he took the extended hand, he studied with equal astonishment the curious combination of elegance and disorder in the dress of his guest, but especially the pistol in his visitor's other hand.

"I—I trust," he stammered, "I am not wanting in hospitality. Monsieur will understand, I am sure. But truly I am not accustomed, at this hour —— This, Monsieur will admit, is a trifle ——"

"Unexpected?" Canardin clapped a hand on the shoulder of his startled host and laughed not the less gayly because his laughter was attuned by habit to the pitch of caution. "Of course it's unexpected! That has long been my profession, my dear Lavallais. That is how I have garnered my wealth—by being unexpected. And even yet you do not recall me? You who have trailed me for years! You do not recognize your Canardin?"

"*Canardin?*"

"Not so loud, my dear Lavallais! Not so loud, I beg of you! Wait! Pardon the liberty. We who have so much to discuss must not be overheard." The intruder moved stealthily to the window, taking pains to throw no shadow from the candle, and after a cautious glance below he noiselessly lowered the sash. "That's better, more intimate," he sighed, turning back again into the little room. "Quite so, my dear Lavallais—Canardin! The Brignon of those old days at Clermont College, now long the Canardin

of general notice, whose company you have courted so long. Since the police gave me that name, I have refused to acknowledge any other."

"Canardin?" Scarcely believing his ears, and even less his eyes, young Lavallais looked his man up and down.

"Aye, Canardin. 'Can it be possible!' you say. It is incredible. Yet here I am, the man whose capture would make your name, your fortune, your place at court! A hundred times you have almost had me. Now I blunder in on you, with equal surprise to us both. Admit, my dear Lavallais, this is droll, is it not? And you do not offer me even a chair! What! Only one chair in your apartment, Lavallais? I must order you one. A gilded one, to match your deserts."

Coolly occupying the solitary chair in the room, Canardin fanned himself with his plumed hat.

"The couch for you, Lavallais, if you must sit," he fared on. "For myself I must confess I am a bit tired. My profession"—and again the low laugh of a man who had not a care in the world—"takes me well into the night, as you see. And I have been kept very busy of late. But you——" Canardin let his eyes rove over the

papers on the table at his side. They rested, finally, where his hand soon came to rest, on the bag of gold. "I observe you also toil by night. And by all the signs, your toil is not altogether in vain!—for all the cracks in your walls." He glanced about with an air mocking and critical.

"If—if you mean the money," Lavallais stuttered, and hastened out a hand toward it in futile protection, "it—it is none of mine."

"Then I may take it with the better conscience. It would distress me to have you object."

"Ah, no! My dear Brignon! Kill me if you must ——"

"My dear fellow! I do not, precisely, make a habit of killing. It is nearly always an accident."

"But—but leave the money to its rightful owner, Brignon! Else my name is blackened completely!"

"Come, come, Lavallais; you tremble! When I mean you no harm." The great fellow rose and laid his hands on Lavallais's shoulders, with a playful pinch by way of displaying his strength when he wished. "Surely one may have his little jest? What! Harm a hair on the head of an old chum at college? How little you know your Canardin! Besides, my dear Lavallais,

you no longer have so much hair to harm!" Laughingly Canardin brushed a hand over the scanty locks of his host. "Come! Am I not the very making of you, Lavallais? Think! Tomorrow you will be able to stroll into the tavern for your stoup, and you will drop the words, airily, this way—'Canardin? Ah, I have been close indeed on his trail, that Canardin! And no longer ago than last night.' Then you will yawn over the sensation you have created. They will demand to know more. In two weeks they will make you *procureur-général.* Have you not looked to Canardin to make your reputation ever since you entered the law? Well! Here I am. You have touched the very hand of Canardin. You are a made man. Yet you tremble like a leaf! Or is it from joy? Come, come, my dear Lavallais"—another shake of the shoulders—"do you not owe me a bit of hospitality for all this? Where is your wine, your cheese? Surely a notary will have a hunk of cheese hidden somewhere, a morsel of bread."

Lavallais sank back upon his cot, in relief as much as amazement, as he watched this hunted man, long and eagerly sought by half the forces of France, stalk about the room as if he had all of eternity at his disposal, and leisurely rum-

mage the cupboard. In a moment Canardin returned to the table, bearing his prize of a loaf of bread and a lump of the expected cheese, which he set down on the table with an arch look, to draw attention to his sagacity. A pitcher also he had taken down, having first smelled of its contents and then gingerly tasted them.

"Ah!" Canardin smacked his lips in exquisite irony. "Milk! Excellent for the nerves, my dear Lavallais; excellent for the nerves! And now"—with his cheeks still rounded with the bread and cheese, he sank into the chair again, his feet sprawled out at ease before him—"now, my friend, let me help myself also to a bit of your talk. You have been niggardly with it. I must say, my dear Lavallais, you are a sparing host."

Driven to collect himself, Lavallais strove, though it cost him an effort, to steady his voice. "My dear Brignon—or Canardin, I beg your pardon—this is droll, as you say. I am sorry you have been so poorly entertained. Perhaps if you understood —— I am indeed obliged to you for your visit. It is"—Lavallais laughed nervously—"even stranger than you know. Even more droll. I—I doubt, however, if your call will mean to me all that you are kind enough to predict. When you entered ——" he faltered,

and ended by pointing to the papers on the table. "See?" He rose and selected a sheet lying uppermost.

"Indeed!" Languidly Canardin accepted the proffered paper. "What have we here? You haven't"—he raised two twinkling eyes before reading—"been rifling some small estate, my dear boy?"

"Far from that!"

Canardin sighed. "What a pity! I was on the edge of proposing a partnership. As men of the same mind, Lavallais —— However!" He turned his attention to the paper and read for a space, until he exclaimed, "As I live!" and again bent a quick glance upon the ashen face of Lavallais.

"I take it, you see," Lavallais laughed uneasily, "I am little likely to interfere with any plans of yours."

Canardin returned to the paper and read on. "So! Can it be! The last fond farewell, it would seem. You, Lavallais! The calm, collected, irreproachable Lavallais! You were on the point of something desperate. You hired this poor place for the purpose. My dear fellow!" Tossing aside the paper, Canardin started up and grasped the hands of his friend,

and still heightened that worthy's astonishment. "I congratulate you! No one is so fully alive as the man about to kill himself. He has served notice. He has proclaimed that he will not be run over. He has treated life to his contempt. But wait!" He shook Lavallais as he would a boy. "It is the very moment to begin! Have you not thrown an alarm into the world? Have you not warned it to beware of you? From now on it has to do with a man of spirit. Come! Sit there and tell me all! But one moment!"

Canardin adjusted himself comfortably in the solitary chair. "Now! Yet perhaps I can guess it. She has refused your hand. She has held you worthless. And you were about to add final proof to her estimate! What folly! To confound a proud woman, one has only to live on. And, if possible, remain at a distance. That precaution, Lavallais, you will notice, has been taken by all the poets." Canardin laughed gently, but by no means merrily, it seemed to Lavallais. For a moment, Canardin himself was silent. "However," he collected himself, "the sex has survived worse affronts than that! Besides, it is precisely as they say. Woman inspires to higher things. To-night one of them inspired me to the very roofs of Paris. Turn

where I pleased, there was her coach at my heels, and her mocking smile at the window. Among all those who have honored me with their pursuit, my dear Lavallais, none has interested me so much. I must learn who she is"—Canardin yawned, as Lavallais thought, to cover something —"and—er—make her way less difficult. But forgive me!" His absent air had vanished. "It is your troubles that concern us. And I may be amiss. The gold on the table here—it is not enough by half to satisfy the old usurer. So you would let him bully others by pointing to your horrid example. Very well. Where is this foul usurer? I have a way with such fellows."

"No, my dear Canardin," Lavallais laughed, "it is not ——"

"'My dear Canardin!' That is good. Lavallais, as a host you are improving!"

"It is not as you suppose," Lavallais was forced to laugh in spite of himself.

"What! It is worse? Lavallais, I begin to think well of you. France will some day have a capable servant in you! But on my word, Lavallais"—Canardin slapped his thigh—"you docile members of an orderly society bring me to the blush. Fie on you, Lavallais!"

Sheepishly, perhaps a little nervously, and still

in spite of himself, Lavallais joined in the laughter at his own expense. "I have to confess that I—I am at present a good deal distraught. I could see no other way out of it. As you say, it is droll in the extreme. That I should be driven to appeal to you —— Yet you, as a man ——"

"Finish it! As a man of resource. Go on."

"As a man of infinite resource," Lavallais laughed, "and acquainted with the world, might —for the sake of old times ——"

"Offer you a bit of advice. I know of no one, my dear Lavallais, to whom a notary might better go for advice!" Canardin chuckled, and now sat up alert in the chair. "I thank you for the opportunity. Because I have a favor to ask in return, and"—again the chuckle—"to make sure of my boon before you do away with yourself, I'll ask my favor first. What do you say, Lavallais? Give me a haven here for the night. For the sake of old times. The phrase is your own. It will amuse us both. I like now and then to be on terms with decent society. Besides, I confess I am weary. It is not that I am, strictly speaking, a popular fellow. I happen only to be a man very much sought. But come, now! Tonight we suspend everything. What do you say? I do not rob you in your sleep, and you forget

you are a candidate for *procureur-général.* To-morrow you take up the chase again. I must ask you to forego killing yourself. The blame would be sure to fall upon me. They would say, 'What! He spares not even an old chum at college!' I cannot allow it. To-night, as I say—to-night" —and Lavallais looked up sharply at the catch in Canardin's voice—" to-night we are old college chums again. What do you say?"

CHAPTER II

TO this, then, had come the lovable boy Brignon of college days! Brignon the ready wit, the born leader, adored by none so much as by Lavallais himself in those days at Clermont! Brignon the prankish, the splendidly daring youth,—now, as a man, feared and yet secretly admired by half of France for his feats of magnificent bravado. For an instant Lavallais sought to make himself believe that here before him sat the renowned Canardin, this casual visitor of midnight or later, this figure so robustious and good-humored, his philosophy so taking, his mien so polished, his attire so elegant, his fame so frightening. Browned like a peasant by life in the open, he carried himself like a prince. One moment devilish, the next debonair. His wit was the despair of his pursuers, and the secret delight of the country. Often his hunters themselves had perforce laughed at his humor in eluding their best laid plans for his taking! For a long, long moment Lavallais sat and studied him.

"Good!" Canardin caught him up on his silence. "You agree, my dear Lavallais. It is settled. To-night we are friends." As if in immense relief, the strange man sprawled more lazily in his chair, rested a careless arm on the table, and more careless still his hand rested calmly on the bag of money. "Now begin on your woes. But I warn you not to make me laugh over loud. There are plenty of ears about. So! 'It is true that she loves me. Yet do what I will, my honest toil brings in too little to suit the stern parent.' I give you my word, Lavallais"—Canardin's head was lolling to and fro on the back of the chair, in utter despair of the world—"these stern parents discourage me. But if your story is to be very long, and very sad, perhaps we had better exchange places. In my present state I have a sudden fancy for your cot. There I may possibly stifle my sobs with a sheet."

They solemnly exchanged places, according to Canardin's direction.

"Now," he sighed. "Have at it!"

Whatever the state of his mind, the young notary was obliged to laugh at these vagaries of his visitor. "You guess very shrewdly, Canardin," he fetched forth at length. "The lady does love me. We were about to be married. The rest of

the tale is brief enough. It is not the parent, but an uncle. The lady is an orphan, and the uncle is her guardian. Six days ago he sent me back to Paris with two bags of gold containing a thousand pistoles each, to settle a debt of his which was due. Naturally I was honored to have him place in my hands a trust of such importance and was eager to fulfill it punctually. But in the coach on the way hither from Meaux I fell in with a friend. In the middle of the day we halted at an inn for refreshment. Perhaps we grew a bit giddy. This fellow—very kindly, I thought—offered to help me guard such a sum of money. 'Canardin, you must remember, is at large in these parts,' he reminded me."

Lavallais paused for a moment's laugh. "But while we were at table the fellow excused himself to consult a lawyer friend who, he had just discovered, was about the inn. I never suspected that under his cloak he carried away one of my bags of gold. And I never saw him again. When I had waited an hour, a valet brought me a note from him, which said that Fate had dashed all his hopes of making a fortune for himself with my kind assistance. Instead, he had lost all the money at lasquenet, and was on the way to the Seine to drown himself."

"Well," Canardin smiled languidly. "That's reasonable. Such things will happen in life. Cannot the uncle understand that?"

Lavallais made a wry face. "He takes himself to be reasonable enough. And indeed he is. I have had until ten o'clock to-morrow morning to make good the loss. Otherwise the marriage is broken off. Such a sum I cannot of course ——"

"Hence the fond note of farewell! I see." Canardin drawled it out, as if from the depths of boredom, hence Lavallais's eyes missed the swift but genuinely tender smile bent upon him. Or was it that Canardin was truly amused at a disaster so trifling? "I tell you, Lavallais," he drawled on mockingly, "I have all I can do to forgive that uncle of yours. What asses these uncles are! They marry their nieces to clowns. The clowns go through the money, as clowns always do; and the uncles are profoundly gratified. So long as the money is lost through stupidity, in the regular way, all is well."

Even more languidly Canardin rolled to his side, so that, out of the corner of his eye, he might enjoy the notary's wilted posture as he sat by the table.

"I rather expected a little more excitement,

you know?" he laughed. "It's my settled belief, Lavallais, that the only real crime in the world is a tame story. However, for the sake of the dear lady, suppose we see what can be done. Here!" Of a sudden Canardin sat up on the couch and removed from his finger a ring of tarnished gold with a stone of green jade. "Take this." He held out the talisman to Lavallais, and now spoke rapidly.

"Listen, if you please. At seven o'clock tomorrow morning you will go to the Rue Beauchaine. You know where it is? From the alley near the end of that street, count nine houses. At the tenth house you will climb to the sixth floor and find a door with a boar's hoof nailed to the panel. An old woman will answer your knock. Show her the ring and she will take you to the rear of the house. There you will meet a humpbacked old man with a long gray beard. Show him the slip of paper I am about to give you."

Without altogether leaving the couch, Canardin lurched forward to the table, tore off a corner of parchment, laid it upon his knee, and began scribbling a string of undecipherable characters across it.

"Let us call that gentleman," Canardin smiled,

"my banker. He will give you the money you need. The ring you will present with my compliments to your bride on her wedding day. It is not to be worn, or shown, except in emergency. If it is shown, my dear Lavallais, you might be somewhat embarrassed by the attentions of my willing followers. Guard that ring as one guards a wife. You know, Lavallais"—the drawl returned, as Canardin still scribbled on—"I rather fancy the ladies,—from a distance. Their little whims are so engaging. On that very account, however, they seem not to fit into my scheme. Now!" he ended, with a final flourish to the paper. "Any more sad stories in your life, my dear Lavallais?"

"But, Canardin, the money ——"

"Where does it come from, you mean?" Canardin yawned once more. "From other stupid uncles. Why shouldn't they even up each other's stupidity? They ought to thank me for performing in their name an act of kindness no one of them would think of doing for himself. And now"—Canardin sank back and settled himself into a more comfortable hollow in the cot—"let's get back to old times, dear Lavallais. Tell me something of our old Clermont lads. Chevaunne, where is he? Cowardly boy, he was, I remember,

always shivering in fear of a licking. What has he come to? "

"He's in the foreign service, I think."

"That's because he must have borrowed a sou and was nervous about remaining in France. And that sneaking, crafty boy, with the fiery hair —we always called him the strawberry plant, you recall—what ever became of him? "

"Trevours, you mean? I believe he has an important post at court."

"Yes, Trevours. That's the name. Serves him right! I always knew he would come to some bad end. And what is his position at court? "

"He is Governor of Paris now."

Canardin lifted his head, for a moment, in interest. "Indeed! I must see that Trevours has something to do.—Hist! "

Lavallais never really was certain that he had seen Canardin move, so swiftly, so noiselessly was it done. He simply sat open-mouthed and became aware of the fact that in a single second Canardin had ceased to be a lolling sluggard on the cot, and was instantaneously a tense figure with a pistol in each hand, quick with excitement, and watching the door, yet careful always to keep behind the candle. For a space there was silence in the room. Then Canardin began

issuing orders, but in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"You hear them? The hounds!—They suspect your light. In a moment they will investigate. I thought I heard a creak on the lower stair.—Go to the window, Lavallais. No, don't rush. Saunter there. Look up at the stars. No, no, man! Let the candle burn. If you douse it, they will be certain!—Do as I say. Seem unconcerned. My life depends upon it, Lavallais. And your own good name.—Now! Open the window as if for a breath of air. One moment! Wait! I have just thought. If you do it badly, Lavallais, remember this; I am here by no invitation of yours. You are not to blame; you are not compromised. Explain that to them. Now, then! Up with the window. If they challenge you, answer. And as you love life, Lavallais, keep your voice steady! Now!"

In a tremble, less from fear than from a thrill of welcome excitement in his studious life, Lavallais did as he was bidden. Stationing himself at the window, he lazily raised his arms to stretch them, carefully examined the stars for a moment, and then opened the sash as if for air. In the street below he could mark the dim forms of thirty men or more in the shadows of the houses,

although he affected not to see them. Instead he appeared to become lost in rapt contemplation of the dissipated half of an old moon then beginning to peer above the roof lines. A minute he stood so, when a voice, in a silvery falsetto, floated up from below.

"What ho, pale poet! Art keeping a tryst with the Lady Luna? The old jade keeps you to ungodly hours in her amours, it would seem."

"Ah!" Lavallais looked down as if in the greatest surprise. "Good morrow, my dear Marshal of France!" he called, in admirable good humor.

A peal of soft laughter rose from the street. "Thanks for the well-merited promotion, my sovereign. How goes the rondeau? Shall I toss you up a couplet?"

"A biscuit would be better," said Lavallais fervently.

"Bravo!" Canardin was approving behind him, his voice safely covered in the laughter from the street at Lavallais's happy sally.

"How goes the empire, Protector of France?" the young notary was adding. "That's a brave band you have there. What's the alarm?"

"Need a few more lackeys at your table, do you, my monarch? Sorry I have none to spare."

"But what an army you muster—for a peaceful night!"

"It is France, Monsieur, on guard over your roundelays!"

"And to-morrow you'll charge me the devil of a price for your guard, in taxes!"

Windows in all the houses round about now were opened, and sleepy heads in pointed nightcaps were thrust out in query. "Taxes?" a thick voice called from one of them. "Do they now collect taxes at this hour of the night? To what is France coming!"

Leaning far out of the window, as he was at this juncture, Lavallais missed Canardin's quick start behind him, as a new voice now spoke from the guard in the street,—a voice rasping and deep, and very evidently accustomed to the accent of command.

"You all tax my patience!" it said. "Go back to your beds, good people. Your taxes are well spent. Be glad you have us to protect your sleep, your purses, your very lives!"

"Alackaday!" from somewhere a girl cried out. "Has something happened?"

"Happened? Oh, no!" the captain of the guard retorted. "Nothing has happened! Nothing but Canardin. He passed this way to-night."

"*Canardin!*" The dread name was chorused in awed tones from a score of windows. "Canardin, did he say?" And down crashed all the sashes in unison, Lavallais's along with them, since he saw it to be a good opportunity to withdraw.

"Well done, my good friend!" Canardin pronounced, when he could cease from chuckling.

"You approve, Canardin?"

"Approve? Lavallais, it was masterly! Now, out with the light." And as Lavallais did so, Canardin laid his pistols on the table, stretched his arms, let forth a hearty yawn, and made his way in the rising moonlight to the cot again. "What was it we were saying, my dear Lavallais?" came the now familiar drawl. "Ah, yes. School days. Sit down and tell me. Chevaunne, you say, went into the foreign service."

"But is it all over down there below, do you think?"

"Oh, they're all off to bed at home, precious glad I saved them a bit of real trouble to-night. To-morrow they'll be bragging to their wives of how narrowly they missed me. That boy, Jean de Braille, at Clermont. You remember him, Lavallais?"

"I believe he is in the Ministry of State. And rising there. He left us all far behind."

"In the Ministry of State? Ah." Canardin thought a moment, then smiled strangely. "I always liked that Jean. Rare lad he was. Twice I filched his jam tarts; he knew it, and never once did he tell. But that insolent pup—surely you recall him, Lavallais?—then the Baron, but now, I believe, the Duc de Morbihan." At this recollection Canardin tossed back his head, held his sides, and passed a full minute in one of his bursts of low laughter. "Do you know what has become of him?"

"He's living on his various estates, I suppose."

"And bored to death on all of them? Not he, my dear Lavallais. Let me tell you something droll. That quick deep voice from the captain of the guard down below—you remember it? That, my dear Lavallais—will you believe it?—was his excellency, the Duc de Morbihan!"

"You don't ——"

"I do mean precisely what I say. He does me the honor of his pursuit. He, the Duc de Morbihan now ardently courts my society! Under pretense of public spirit in the service of France, he is privately working off a personal grudge. Not that he wouldn't kill me for his own sake, if

I should let him; but it is so much less vulgar to do so as an officer of France, you see."

"But what grudge can the Duc de Morbihan ——"

"Have against me? Oh, more than one. On a night last week, for example, I happened to be in bad humor and burned down one of his châteaux. That is to say, I relieved him of a needless expense. It is only one of many little kindnesses I have paid him since those days at college. Do you know, Lavallais, it sometimes occurs to me, Clermont must have been organized purposely to teach the youth of France how to capture Canardin."

Lazily Lavallais's visitor removed his waistcoat. A ray of moonlight laid a still whiter stripe across his silken white shirt. But here he paused in his evident preparations for a quiet night, and his dark eyes blazed.

"Lavallais, do you recall the incident at Clermont when I stole the honey pots belonging to the principal himself? You remember, then, when I was caught, all the boys were privileged to give me a beating in turn. Little I cared! I had had the honey. But De Morbihan! That was a brutal lacing he gave me. I remember his insolence. Well he might lay it on. The privi-

lege was his, and I was obliged to take whatever he gave. At that, it wasn't his blows that hurt me; it was that manner of his. As if he had an immemorial right to be lashing such fellows as I. That manner of his, my dear Lavallais, sent me down what is called a career of crime. Till then I had stolen for amusement. From that moment I took a lash of my own in hand. By the way" —Canardin broke off abruptly—" here's a pile of my clothing." He tossed out the various articles of his discarded attire. " Spread them out on the floor, and lie on them, and be comfortable. They'll make a capital bed."

Coolly Canardin adjusted the coverlet about himself on the cot, meanwhile.

"After all, Lavallais, I'm rather clever in my way. I might have had a career in your precious society. If it had let me! But it was hunger, Lavallais, that broke me. Always I seem to remember that hunger. My parents were rich enough, but they were bourgeois, and had no appreciation of genius. Their notion of sending a boy down the right path was to see him well starved. I took the direction they indicated! They have made me a man of wealth. As a young man should, I have learned something from the precepts of my parents. Even so ——"

Canardin let forth another prodigious yawn.

"Even so I might, as you say, have done well in the world. But the hunger of boyhood is nothing to the hunger of manhood. That is a hunger not of the stomach but of the head,—a hunger for opportunity, for a place in the world. Well, after all, that has not been denied me, you observe."

Lavallais sat listening in his chair, dumb under the spell of this strange philosopher, this explosive personality.

"The world," he heard the smooth, deep voice coming out of the shadows, "has treated me precisely like my fond parents. I was a bourgeois, and it proceeded to starve me. I had brains; I had ambition. That is the combination that runs the world. Yet look how we treat it! If a man is crafty and sour, he becomes a Richelieu. If he has a sense of humor, he becomes an honest brigand like me. Pah! I merely take what is just from brigands less honest than I. I merely toss aside the dry rules of your society, which always go wrong, and administer a plain justice of my own. It is true that when some stubborn individual has raised objections, I have been obliged to reduce him to silence. But I, my good Lavallais, I am myself a society. You agree?"

Canardin glanced down at the quiet figure now huddled on the floor beside him.

"The fool is asleep!" he laughed lightly and rolled over. "How I have raved!"

When Lavallais awoke, he was astonished to find himself still prone on the hard floor, but alone. His guest was gone. So also was gone all the clothing to Lavallais's name. Nothing remained to him except the rumpled finery which had formed his very indifferent bed, belonging to the most celebrated robber in France. Yet on the bag of gold, which he found untouched, lay a note that ran:

I am sure, my dear Lavallais, you will pardon my theft of your coat and breeches. It must please you to think of me in the guise of an honest man at last. Besides, it was the one way left me to get out of the street.

On my part it pleases me to think of you in possession of my clothing. You will find it a valuable clue as you resume the chase. You have only to carry it to the nearest guard house to become the talk of all France. I leave you to fashion the story of how you got it.

Adieu, my dear Lavallais. May we meet again, under circumstances as happy.

Your devoted

CANARDIN.

On that morning the wit of Monsieur Lavallais, the rising young notary, was sorely taxed

for an answer to one or more extremely vexing questions. Should he carefully blow out his brains, as he had planned to do on the previous evening? Or should he consent to live on, pay the unreasonable uncle, attain fame, and marry the lady of his choice, on stolen money received from the foremost thief of France? For some time young Monsieur Lavallais, twirling his incipient mustachios, paced to and fro in the narrow confines of his garret, wrestling with these trying problems. In the end the lover in Monsieur Lavallais came to a decision, leaving the notary in Monsieur Lavallais to excuse such conduct as he could. Monsieur Lavallais the lover decided to live.

It was no great trick to him to contrive some means of leaving his lodging, although he was obliged to laugh heartily at the prank played upon him as he turned inside out the garments left by Canardin. The resulting garb was a motley of blue silk and pink satin linings, but these his ingenuity easily concealed under a cloak somewhat in the Spanish style, fashioned from an old gray blanket.

Thus was his body clothed; but what about a cloak for his morals? Here too ingenuity was not long wanting. That powerful logic which is

habitual to a notary's mind quickly came to his aid.

This note of exchange which Canardin had left him,—this too might be part of the hoax, it is true. At the same time it occurred to Monsieur Lavallais, the future public prosecutor, that he might as well test its value. Moreover, on presenting it at the address given, he might obtain the most valuable evidence in pursuit of his celebrated quarry! And in obtaining such evidence against the master thief, would he not be performing a great disinterested service to his king and his country?

Accordingly Monsieur Lavallais, young notary and future prosecutor, set out for the Rue Beauchaine—and found it—in a neighborhood where the strange character of his attire was little likely to attract unfavorable attention. The few persons in the street were even more outlandishly garbed than he. The tenth house beyond the alley was truly there, and at the back of the sixth floor was the door with the boar's foot nailed to the panel. Precisely as Canardin had promised, the old woman admitted him; and, in a word, he came away with a bag of gold,—let it be understood, as evidence against Canardin solely.

Having returned to his garret study with this

prize, Monsieur Lavallais, the notary, proceeded to weigh the evidence. He first counted the evidence. The thousand pistoles were all there.

Monsieur Lavallais then began to consider his own situation. Here was a rising young notary, who had before him, as public prosecutor, a brilliant future,—this on the word of possibly the highest authority in France. This young notary had a sacred duty to perform. Had he not been commissioned by an uncle to discharge a solemn obligation? That obligation sternly called for satisfaction. Before Monsieur Lavallais, lying there on his table, was the means of satisfying that obligation. Much else would it satisfy, indeed. There was an uncle's reputation, which it would sustain. There was a creditor's just dues, which it would meet. Was there not, truly, a certain purification of money, whatever its source, in putting it to such honorable uses?

If, after all this, Monsieur Lavallais still had doubts on the subject, he had only to look ahead. Suppose he used the money and paid the debt. A needy creditor would be happy in the receipt of his money at last. An uncle's reputation would be secure. Monsieur Lavallais's own personal probity would be vindicated. And all this being

so, the way was unexpectedly clear to—to a return to the favor of Cécile.

Cécile! Ah, yes! There you have the most potent logic of all. Monsieur Lavallais turned it over in his mind. Could the happiness of Cécile be forgotten? Did it not outweigh every other consideration? What silly demand of ethics could rise superior to the claims of a woman! Monsieur Lavallais the notary, as well as Monsieur Lavallais the lover decided to make use of the money.

With six pistoles from the bag he had just received, he risked the ridicule of the streets to visit a near-by tailor, with a fantastic story of having been robbed of all his clothing. A tailor, however, asks few questions of a customer with six golden pistoles in his hand. Moreover, this too seemed to Monsieur Lavallais only part of the logic of his case. Who but Canardin should be the one to replace his stolen garments?

In his new finery, Monsieur Lavallais next hired a coach and set out with the two bags of pistoles to satisfy his uncle's debt. A creditor receiving the payment of money is apt to be in a cheerful frame of mind. When the man who comes to pay a debt arrives in a coach, with every evidence of rank and importance, your creditor is

not in a mood to quibble over discounts. As a result of his happy visit to his uncle's creditor, Monsieur Lavallais came away the logical possessor of a receipt in full to return to the uncle, and his pockets jingling with the proceeds of a discount of ten pistoles and as logical a commission of ten pistoles besides. Deducting the six pistoles of the discount which he had spent in advance, quite as logically, this left him a balance of fourteen pieces of money to support his dignity until he should earn some more.

The next step, as Monsieur Lavallais reasoned, was to rush off to Meaux and present himself and his happy account to Cécile. This he forthwith did, yet not without misgivings.

CHAPTER III

AS the good folk in the little street where Lavallais had found his garret were now accustomed to the early beginning of his days, Canardin fetched no more than the usual number of curious faces to the windows when he himself sallied forth, at an unripe hour that same morning, from Lavallais's doorway. Without recourse to notarial logic, Canardin well knew, from long experience, as from the instinct of his kind, that for security and retirement no place would better suit him than the more crowded thoroughfares of Paris. He therefore bent his steps in the direction of the Seine and its quays. And inasmuch as an amiable little scheme, one not without its amusing features, had suddenly fashioned itself in his head, he hummed a little tune as he strode along.

Not even by design itself could Lavallais's garb have better fitted in with the scene of Canardin's choice. It is true that across Canardin's ample shoulders the notary's well-worn coat sat somewhat close, and the even closer fit of the breeches

lent an element of hazard to the habitual length of his stride. Yet here again accident served even better than purpose. Canardin but looked more truly the notary in looking the more indifferently clothed. And by means of a slight stoop he learned he could both ease the pinch and heighten the semblance.

In one particular only did Canardin depart at length from the fidelity of his impersonation. After a time, finding the dozen or more coppers in Lavaillais's pockets somewhat fewer than he was accustomed to by habit and taste, he first paid a visit of his own to the Rue Beauchaine and to the door with the boar's hoof nailed to the panel. It only remains to say that the plentiful supply of money he carried away pleased him less than the fright he left behind with his "banker." That humped old rascal, used as he was to Canardin's caprices, was like to die of a fit at sight of a caller at that hour in the garb of a man of the law. And it need scarcely be added that Canardin, a capital comedian whenever he pleased, made the most of his moment.

"Well, well, old watchdog," he laughed, when he had disclosed himself at last, "old human question-mark! The lone man in the world that I'd

scruple to knock down! A sound man in your shoes would have died long ago from my thumps of approval on his back. But let's come at once to your one concern in life. How stands the level in the coffers this morning?"

"Melting away like butter! Well enough you ought to know, my chief. These widows and orphans will be the ruin of you. How often have I been obliged to warn you of that weakness!"

"Yes, yes, old Bonbouche. But you forget. A pillar of society like myself has his responsibilities. This morning, perhaps a little earlier, did a ——?"

"He did! He came and he went. Early. Not an hour ago. And with him went a thousand pistoles, no less. But for the paper he bore, in your own code ——"

"Quite so. But tell me. How did he look and bear himself? Clothed in the pink of fashion, I'll warrant? And calm as a corpse, no doubt?"

For some minutes Canardin rocked with merriment over the description of Lavallais he received, and refused to be sobered even as the old man closed with the stern demand of his habit, "And now, what luck last night?"

"Oh, magnificent! I must tell you." As

Canardin's pockets expanded, his spirits were apt to expand equally, and he now sat down on a chest under the cobwebbed rafters of the garret. "No vast luck with the old potter Joumette, if that's what you mean. A mere thousand livres —which, by the by, I was obliged to leave on deposit along the way. I chanced to be in a hurry, and they were an encumbrance. Besides, that same young woman —— However ——" Canardin paused. "But, my good Bonbouche, I am persuaded you are right. The walls of that beggar Joumette's house are lined with silver. Not so, however, the cloud over the good man's head! Will you believe me, for two solid hours I waited in the shadows beside his bed. And for two solid hours his wife kept Joumette and me enduring her reproaches. At last I could bear it no longer.

"'Canardin,' said I, 'it is your lot to be able to leave. Joumette is not so fortunate.' That woman, Bonbouche, was on the point of robbing me of a thousand livres and my good opinion of her sex. When, suddenly, she began to spout priceless wisdom. They call me a clever fellow, Bonbouche. It is only that I have sharp ears.

"'A mere thousand livres you take in to-day!' the old harpy howls. 'The merest instalment on

Monsieur de Braille's account! And where do you leave it? Safe in the cupboard below! Where any cub apprentice of Monsieur Canardin is like to find it!'

"Instantly, Bonbouche, I have an interest in that cupboard. It will do to wait, however. Madame has more to say. Much more. In another moment Madame Joumette has recalled my wandering respect for the institution of matrimony.

"'A thousand livres, forsooth!' Madame goes on, in the most prodigal good sense. 'Over a thousand livres you rub your hands, as if it were the last full reward of my life's devotion to you!' Whereas, Bonbouche, such devotion, you will admit, is priceless. 'It is but the month's allowance that Guillemont the perfumer allots his wife. But yesterday she showed it me in a drawer of her console. As for Madame Tourmaine and the jewels that litter her escritoire, not to speak of the pecks she wears by day and slips beneath her pillow as if they were nothing, they keep me beggared in merely confessing my sins of envy! So much for what other husbands do for their wives!'

"I leave it to you, Bonbouche, if it were not my solemn duty to relieve Madame of so many

temptations to sin, along with the thousand livres. Joumette, I resolved, should enjoy his wife's devotion without the cost of a sou."

After they had laughed enough over this, the crooked old fellow again reverted to his passion. "But to-morrow, early," he wheedled, "like a good fellow, you will go and pick up the thousand livres from their hiding place."

"To-morrow," said Canardin, "I shall do no such thing. I have, instead, to-day, a little errand beside which those thousand livres are as nothing. Joumette and his thousand livres, forsooth; Madame Tourmaine and her trinkets! Useful, Bonbouche, and yet how petty. Now" —Canardin's arms yearned out as if for employment—"for a moonlit road in the wilds; a fat merchant back from Havre and England with half a million about him; half an army to guard his coach; lusty guardsmen, too; half a dozen of my own, and I, to have a parley with Monsieur the merchant; we encounter objection, we have a difference, a discussion, a dispute, a mêlée; crack of pistols, cracking of heads; one last rush—and we're away! That, Bonbouche, is taking proper care of your widows and orphans! To make up for that, Paris must amuse me. Do you know, my friend,"—Canardin gave a twirl to his

mustachios, a twist to his shoulders—"I've acquired a sudden taste for polite society."

"At last!" Bonbouche sighed. "I've been expecting it! Woman!"

"I wish it were," said Canardin cheerfully. "Instead it's merely a long deferred call. 'Tis a scandal I've not sought him out since college days, that splendid fellow, Jean de Braille! Especially considering what he can do for me!"

"De Braille? Secretary to the King's Councillor, Admiral ——?"

"Even he."

Instantly the bent old man was on his knees before Canardin. "Master, I beg of you! Take no such risk! It is madness! I shall never see you again!"

"Nor any more money? Isn't that your fear, putting it honestly?"

"But such pranks will be the death of you! Be reasonable! There are feats that even Canardin may not bring off! Stick to the widows and orphans, cost us what it may!"

"Peace, man!" said Canardin patiently. "I hadn't completed the tale of the adventure of last night. After I had finished with Monsieur Joumette, his good wife must have heard something. I take it she sleeps with one ear open.

At any rate the alarm was raised, and I was obliged to hasten. The soldiers were too many for my taste, and once again I had to keep company with the cats. That's to say, on the roofs. The truth is"—Canardin snapped his fingers, with less patience again—"there's a new wit after me. A woman. I can't quite make her out. She confounds my calculations. Will you believe it, I found in the very pocket of my coat the other morning, a slip of paper in her hand. One word—'Beware!' I believe it is she who lends them all the brains they've got. It's clear that I've come afoul of some one. But who, who!" For a space Canardin paced the floor thoughtfully. "But as to what followed, last night, old wolf——" He tapped the crooked old back, and it was some time before he had recovered composure to relate the remainder of the night's events.

Since, however, we know already what he was about to relate, and shall soon hear more of the new drollery in his mind, it will do to follow Canardin at once that morning, first of all to a bookseller's stall beside the Seine, for the purchase of a musty tome to nestle appropriately under his arm and so signify his new calling as a notary.

Brief as it was, this transaction provided Canardin with a moment of interest. "Did I hear you mention Canardin?" he whisked about to demand of a group of passers-by on the quay, for his sharp ear had caught the syllables of his name on their laughing lips.

"What, friend notary!" one of them answered. "But no, you gentry of the law would be the last to hear!"

"Canardin, yes!" another was eager to say. "He popped among us again last night. Five hundred soldiery, and Trevours himself raging like a madman at his heels! And like that!"—a snap of the finger—"he vanished from under their very noses!"

"What a Frenchman is that!" still another carried on the comment as they left this sour notary to his business. "I vote him a stipend from the King's treasury! He never fails to pluck the old skinflints we'd all strip if we dared. And he keeps us amused, to boot!"

Whereupon Canardin smiled, chiefly at their tribute to his false impersonation. Nevertheless, further to improve that, he next repaired to a barber, where for above an hour he played the notary to the life. When at last Canardin issued, satisfied with his appearance, after a shave

and many other more astonishing operations of the toilet, his naturally abundant hair was pomaded flat to his head and tied in a niggardly tail at the rear; the crumpled, cocked hat of Lavallais was crammed upon his ears, and any good widow in arrears with her rent would have shivered properly enough at the look he had studiously affixed to his face. For a little while longer Canardin went his way afoot among the now swelling crowds upon the quays and the bridges, by way of further testing the faithfulness of his impersonation, and drew almost a true notary's comfort from the sour and hateful glances of those who noticed him at all.

Quite assured now in his headlong benevolence, Canardin presently hailed a public coach and had himself boldly driven, first of all to a tavern for breakfast, where he ate like an honest notary who has just settled an estate in fullest accord with the laws of the King. The next address he gave to his coachman was a point no other than the fashionable quarter adjoining the Tuileries palace. Here, on the top step before a mansion in the Rue St. Honoré, he fixed a frightened flunkey with the incriminating look proper to a man of the law and announced:

"A visitor for Monsieur de Braille—if he is about so early."

On being assured, with some indignation, that Monsieur kept thus excellent hours, Canardin further astonished the liveried jackanapes with the toss of a golden coin and the dry advice:

"Discharge my coach on your own terms, and keep the remainder"—which naturally meant all but the whole of it.

A smaller coin sufficed to hurry another flunkey indoors with a card which Canardin had prudently found in one of Lavallais's pockets. Naturally it proclaimed the name and the occupation of Armand Lavallais. Canardin was bidden to follow. Rich eccentrics, whatever their mode of attire, if they are loose with their change, have never wanted for courteous tolerance in any time or clime, and while Canardin was obliged to wait half an hour, his waiting was done in no antechamber. Straight to the bureau of Monsieur de Braille, confidential secretary to the Admiral Cantigny, for the moment a member of the King's Council, he was ushered and stood before a cheerful and inviting fire on the hearth. Accustomed as he was, at least for brief periods, to the surroundings of the rich, Canardin seated himself with the patient inquiry:

"I hope Monsieur will not be long? I find myself pressed for time."

"Monsieur," said the flunkey, "begs you will excuse him for a few moments while he dismisses a messenger from the King."

With an air of resignation and the words, "Ah, well," Canardin settled back in his chair, not without note of a jeweled snuff-box on the mantel before him, which, when the flunkey was gone, he slipped into his pocket as a truly priceless souvenir of his visit. As the wait lengthened out he cast about for what other trifle he might take with him for the sake of remembrance, and was presently attracted to an object promising exceptional usefulness. On the desk of De Braille, among a pile of *dossiers* there scattered, his rapid eye fell upon one marked "De Morbihan." Scarcely had Canardin, not troubling at the time to examine his find, slipped it between the pages of his book, when a cheery voice somewhere behind him broke into a hail on the hurried opening of a door.

"Ah, my old friend, Armand! Armand de Lavallais! To what do I owe this honor?"

"Not yet *De* Lavallais, my dear De Braille," Canardin smiled drily, remembering in the nick of time to cut down his natural good nature to

the character he had assumed. "Or rather, no longer *De* Lavallais, since a loose-fisted grandfather mislaid it somewhere in the past."

"We shall have to find it again! Or fashion a new one!"

"That would be generous. And let us say, useful. Especially to your King. Because that 'de' would be sure to cost me double in taxes," Canardin smiled a little more amply. At the same time he felt his hand taken warmly between both the hands of his host, whilst he glanced into a shrewd but kindly pair of eyes twinkling in a face handsome and jovial and yet touched with dignity. Its owner, by the way, was under no compulsion of scaling down his good humor to the measure of a false character.

"Let's make it De Lavallais at once!" De Braille said heartily, as the two found chairs for themselves. "And I'll tax you immediately myself."

"What! Is there something else that I owe?"

"An apology, at least. For depriving me all these years of your company. And of the privilege of doing something for you."

For just an instant Canardin caught his breath, and into his eye crept something that was wistful, as he glanced over the unaffectedly

bonny, unsuspectingly genial young man before him. During that second Canardin felt many things, chiefly a twinge of honest regret at deceiving this open fellow whom he had loved and envied long ago. There before Canardin sat the possible materials of something he had never known in life,—a friendship. The pause gave him a becoming air of embarrassment.

"Think of it, Armand! For shame!" he was hearing. "Not since the days at Clermont have I seen you! It is your own fault if I tell you that but for your card I might not have remembered who you are!"

Canardin, studying his man, listened on.

"That, of course," De Braille was laughing, "would have been stupid. That serious, studious, sober face," he cocked his head critically at Canardin. "The one honest face in France! How could I forget it! Come, Armand, old friend, what is it?"

"My dear Jean," laughed Canardin, "just when I set you down as a courtier, you come to the point like a statesman. Naturally it is to ask a favor that I am here after all these years. It is always the way. At the same time," he ended more drily, "I may say I have been rather busy of late."

"Come, come! You have only to speak. I'm all eagerness to hear what it is. At least let me know. Only make it something that I can do. Else I may have to remind you that I am not, precisely, the King himself!"

"Very well, then, Monsieur, it is this."

"Armand! Remember, please, I am always Jean to you," De Braille said kindly.

"That is good of you, Jean," Canardin answered,—and paused again for a wistful look. "What I want, I think I may truthfully say," he laughed gently at his own double meaning, but with excellent effect for his cause, "is not for myself. No favor to me personally. In a word, it is this. I want Armand Lavallais ——"

"De Lavallais," Jean interrupted.

"I want Armand de Lavallais to enjoy a fuller opportunity of service in His Majesty's cause."

Instantly De Braille's hands went up, so that Canardin fancied he had opened a false trail. He was at once disabused. "Armand, my simple friend! You are one in a thousand! In a million! The one man of your kind in France! Such language is rare in this room."

"But, seriously ——"

"Oh, ask me anything now! A dukedom, whatever you will! You are a marked man!"

"Yes," laughed Canardin drily, "I have sometimes thought so myself. But wait till you have heard. Armand de Lavallais must be something more than a notary. To be of maximum use to the King he must have privileges and powers ——"

"He shall have them! You, I mean. But why? Is it to impress the lady?" De Braille laughed gaily at his own sagacity, and thereby disclosed his own state of mind. "Ah," he continued, "though I have not seen you these years, I have heard your name at Court, through the blushes of Cécile de Grammont."

Canardin laughed also as he absorbed this useful information. "It will help," he said.

"And to what other good end?"

Canardin settled back in his chair to the comfortable thrill of his errand. "Very well. Of course," he began, narrowly watching his man and awaiting the effect of his words, "of course you have heard of the man called Canardin?"

"Oh, have I!" De Braille laughed, and again his hands went up, but this time in no pretended consternation. "But for that Canardin I should be almost a happy man! He's nearly as hard to snare as—as ——" De Braille caught himself

sheepishly. "Of that later! But don't tell me, Armand, that you too, the shrewd, cool Armand, have been fascinated by that will-o'-the-wisp!"

"Would it startle you, my dear Jean, if I told you I might soon have that Canardin here before you?"

"No." Jean smiled. "For the simple reason that it is so little likely to happen!"

"Forgive me if I seem to boast, my dear friend," Canardin leaned forward to say, "but Canardin is closer to being before you than you may be ready to believe."

"Armand! I never should have suspected you of being so taken in!" De Braille was still amused.

"But no longer ago than last night I actually saw the man."

"My dear Armand, there isn't a man in France who doesn't boast of having seen the tails of his coat!"

"He was in my room!"

"That's what all the children say!"

"I exchanged a word with him!"

"And yet you come here without him! Armand!" The confidential secretary to a member of the King's Council indulgently patted

Canardin's knee. "Come!" he said gently, "I have heard of your devotion to that man Canardin. But don't fancy, my dear old friend, that to enjoy promotion you are condemned to chase any such phantasm. Of course you will catch him in the end," he added still more gently; for Canardin, though he was suitably complimented by all this, felt driven to assume a rueful expression in justice to Lavallais. "May the honor fall to you, Armand. And you shall be properly rewarded when it does. There will be ready for you a place at Court, never fear. But do you know ——?"

De Braille leaned confidentially closer. "Be anything else you choose in the meanwhile, and Canardin's captor whenever you find it convenient. As for me—this is highly treasonable, my dear Armand. I might lose my head for it—it would grieve me little if that Canardin were never captured,—even by you! What would life be like without that fellow! He keeps all France amused. There's the mischief of him. It is so hard to be angry with him, as one should. Trevours, De Morbihan—he has all their mortal enemies laughing at their frantic efforts to capture him. I give you my word, since our days together at Clermont I have had a secret love and

admiration for that fellow. Brignon! Was boy or man ever so winning with that roguish smile of his! Often and often I've wondered if so wild a talent might never be tamed and cabined like one of us. But no, that would spoil him. He was born to divert us. And in the long run lose his head like them all. But—I hope that catastrophe will be long postponed. And by the way ——"

Canardin had sat leaning back in his chair, listening with even wonder and suspicion,—suspicion as to whether De Braille might not have a subtle and sinister point beneath such talk. Here the honest and merry young fellow relieved his guest of all uneasiness.

"This is strange talk for the secretary to a member of the King's Council, you'll admit. But while we are talking here, just as Armand and Jean, two old friends together, let me mention a matter of real importance." Through a bright blush on his face, De Braille smiled foolishly as he drew from beneath his brocaded waistcoat a locket which he opened to disclose a very delicately painted miniature. This he somewhat timidly offered to Canardin's inspection, with the simple and conclusive words,

"That is she."

"So I observe," said Canardin, the more drily because De Braille filled the time with speech of his own, which was probably as well, because Canardin might scarcely have cared to speak what was in his own mind. From the miniature looked the same mocking face he had seen at his side more than comfortably often of late. Too busy with looking to listen, he took no heed of De Braille's empty rattling in his ear:

"Were ever such eyes before!" (Canardin thought not.) "So roguish a smile? Answer me!" (And Canardin almost answered.) "Can you not see the wit that is there!" (Canardin thought he could.) "The spirit! The raillery! And ah, but it can be haughty and biting at times! At other times so sweetly melting! At all times so sprightly! Her bewitching airs—they have me mad! And oh, but she has a shrewd head on her shoulders! My faith, Armand! I'm supposed to be concerned here with trifling matters of state; but there is where my head is all the while! With excellent excuse, you'll grant me, eh?"

This strain De Braille kept going for some little while, with that enthusiasm of a lover which, to those who are obliged to listen to him, is not always so catching as he supposes. In this in-

stance it is enough to say that Canardin—such was the spell upon him of the painted thing in his hand—listened to the end without a trace of boredom. Indeed, had De Braille at that moment a spark of interest left from the topic uppermost on his mind, he might have noticed on the face of his guest an expression far removed from boredom. Instead, he babbled on:

"And I must tell you, Armand! Will you believe it! She, too, has lent her heart, her soul, her madcap wits, to the capture of Canardin! Ah, but you shall have to exert yourself, with competition such as that! That man's doom is sealed who has a witty and pretty woman at his heels! I'll stake her, Armand, against you all!" De Braille exulted. "And just to make a pretty race of it, I'll help you all I can. You'll admit I'm fair enough, barring the odds you have against you? What her methods are, what is her plan of attack?—ah, that would be unfair to her! But come, what is it you need? Which reminds me. You have come on a serious errand, and I have been frivolous."

"I believe," said Canardin, hiding under a dry tone of voice the decided new interest aroused in him, "I did mention certain special powers and privileges ——"

"Ah, yes; that's it. Away with rents, and deeds, and suits, and such like. No more dry civil law for you, eh? The spirit of romance has got into you. Fortune alone will no longer do. You must have a bit of spice, a dash of fame. So you will capture Canardin! Eh, Lavallais? Very good. It is a noble ambition. Let us help it along. What would you say if I obtained for you"—here De Braille paused with fine dramatic effect, and with his next words all but lifted Canardin out of his chair—"what would you say if I obtained for you a *lettre de cachet?*" He paused again, for that to sink in. "Now say that I grudge anything to an old friend! With that little slip of paper in your keeping, you are almost the King himself. But I need not remind Armand de Lavallais what it will do for him, what doors it will unlock, what persons will do his bidding, what positive terror he may strike with it, if he pleases! How is that for a fair start against Mademoiselle Julie? What is more, you shall have it to-day. To-night, at the latest. In ten minutes I shall have a courier on the way to Versailles. His Majesty's digestion is improved of late. We must take advantage of that. He will not refuse me his signature, I am certain. Not for the capture of Can-

ardin, my friend! Nor shall I forget the new patent of nobility. There!"

De Braille was rising, either because he had affairs of state at heart, or affairs of heart at stake, it matters little which. As for Canardin, beneath his notarial decorum, which it cost him infinite effort to maintain, he was in a state of considerable commotion! Such utterly incredible profit to himself, from a lark, a droll amusement, an errand of simple benevolence he had proposed to himself in the name of poor Lavallais! A *lettre de cachet!*—A little thing like that, Canardin decided, would have its convenience for him,—even though it cost his vanity the impersonation of a country notary now and then!

"But wait! One moment before you go," De Braille was saying, now no mean man of business, as you see from his choice of words. "It is just as well that you should acquaint yourself with our own poor plans for Canardin's capture." He hastened to his desk and began fumbling among the litter of packets and papers lying there. Two of these he selected, but with poor success still hunted for a third. "Curse me!" he mumbled. "Where have I mislaid the most important of all! Morbihan will bless me if ——"

"Perhaps this is it?" Canardin stooped under the table to find the packet labelled "Duc de Morbihan" at the precise moment that he deftly let it slip from between the leaves of the book beneath his arm.

"Oh, wonderful fortune, Armand! I should have been disgraced without that! Surely my case looks hopeless!" De Braille gaily excused himself on receipt of the *dossier*. "It is odd how an affection of the heart always reaches to the head. These three"—he now held the packets out to Canardin—"take them with you and look them over for your profit. I need not remind you what a trust they are. It will do if you return them when you call to-night for a certain other document which shall be ready then. Of course you will come in person for that. If it happens that I find myself engaged," De Braille smiled pointedly, "a confidential clerk will hand it to you instead. But you alone are qualified to receive such a thing, remember. And, by the by, it will do you no harm to consult Trevours. You must know him well. The Governor of Paris may have suggestions of value. And I doubt not he will be grateful for any advice of yours. And now"—De Braille was speaking rapidly, his mind quite evidently in another quarter alto-

gether, and his person eager to follow it, "you'll forgive me, I'm sure. Especially as I mean this to be but the first of many such happy occasions between us."

De Braille's hand extended itself to Canardin, a brighter smile than ever came to his face, and in a moment the secretary, soul of amiability, was at the door to his private apartments. Almost he had vanished through it, when, turning suddenly, he heard himself recalled.

"Jean! If you please!" Canardin had halted him. "Trevours I will see—gladly!" he added grimly. "I can learn a deal about Canardin from him! These I will consent to look over only as you are with me. To take them with me would be, I feel, prying." Canardin was holding out the envelopes, containing information of priceless importance to himself.

"As you will, my dear fellow!" De Braille laughed, perhaps a little touched, and yet amused. These punctilious notaries, what tiresome sticklers they were for decorum! "And now—adieu! But no! How stupid of me! I have just thought!" He rushed forward and grasped Canardin by the shoulders. "You are to be one of us on Friday night, old fellow! Almost I had forgotten! Your invitation must

have gone astray. That Canardin will be the death of you! But come! The Duc d'Orleans is giving us a little revel on Friday night at the Palais Royal. Among other things a new comedy by Molière—another old college fellow of ours, you know. Gaming afterward—of various kinds! Mademoiselle Julie will be there. You shall have a sight of your formidable rival! Cécile, I hear, has declined. Some uncle or other is in bad sorts. Will she grill you for coming without her?" De Braille laughed as he gave Canardin a final shake. "At least, look in for a moment. She cannot slay you for that. Trevours will be there. I have it! Tell the jealous lady you went there to consult Trevours, strictly on business! And now I am off!" And so he was.

For a space, Canardin, left to himself, studied the door just then closed upon the laughing De Braille. Suddenly he whisked about, drew from his pocket De Braille's jeweled snuff-box, and with a snap replaced it upon the mantel. It must be owned of Canardin that he did peep into the packet labeled "Morbihan" before tossing it back among the *dossiers* on the secretary's table. Then he left.

And the lackey who let him out of the door in front, had he not been dwelling on his own lady

love, might have overheard a muttered remark which would have been worth to him more than one princely tip in Paris that night.

"Fie on you, Canardin! Almost you played the scoundrel!" Such was the remark.

"*Canardin?*" he did hear shouted in his very ear by one who, it appears, did chance to overhear.

Canardin's motions again almost passed the eye for swiftness. His right arm shot to his left side for the blade that was not there and quickly rested on the book instead. In that instant he ceased to be Canardin the ready and was Lavallais the startled, and the blaze in his eye softened to a smile as he confronted a figure evidently emerged from a well-guarded coach in the street, and now rapidly mounting the steps before him. This figure, wonderfully bedizened in velvet and laces, Canardin instinctively guessed to be that of Trevours, the Governor of Paris.

CHAPTER IV

GREAT warriors, great poets, even horses fleeter than their brothers, and men shrewd above their kind are not always distinguished by marks which set them off unmistakably from the crowd; otherwise Canardin, lean, lithe, and alert as he was, might have passed as a nobody —which, in truth, the modest fellow was often content to do—and Trevours would have been hailed at once, from his bulk, his raiment, and his manner, as the final effort of our common Creator. The man whom Canardin now smiled upon was of towering height and clearly of corresponding strength. His bronze face was stern to the pitch of ferocity, an effect carefully fixed and even enhanced by a pair of formidable mustachios and a sharply pointed beard. Merely to look into his eye, steely blue and piercing, required an abundance of courage. And strictly in keeping with all this was the gentleman's voice.

"Did I hear Monsieur mention the fellow

Canardin?" this person boomed in a menacing manner, as he now mounted closer on the steps.

It was a ticklish moment. Like a hawk Canardin kept watch on this newcomer, for any light of recognition in his eyes. Neither did Canardin lose sight of the numerous guard gazing up from the street in some excitement. One other swift glance he spared for some possible, last, desperate avenue of flight, this way or that, if it transpired that he had been trapped.

"What Monsieur may have *over*heard," said Canardin freezingly, haughtily, as became the situation, "is of little interest to me. I should say, however," he added, even more icily, "that Monsieur had Monsieur Canardin very much on his mind."

On the next instant the tension was suddenly relaxed for Canardin. With an evident respect for the nasty tongue of another of these annoying notary persons, the great man contented himself with ruffling up his gorgeous plumage and swept grandly past the frightened lackeys into De Braille's empty house. Canardin, on his own part, lost no time in descending the steps and passing the uncomfortably curious men of the guard, with a stiffness in his step that was not altogether born of an offended dignity. Once

safely round the nearest corner, he quickly vanished toward his more settled haunts.

"Ah! Master! Again!" cried the bent old fellow Bonbouche, startled as Canardin darted like an apparition into the attic retreat in the Rue Beauchaine. "And with the Joumettes' thousand livres!" For Canardin had not neglected, at a favorable moment, to recover from its hiding place Madame Joumette's temptation to envy. "Do you wonder, master, that I suffer from ague!" the old one babbled nervously. "In the morning it is a fever of fear, when I know you can never possibly return. In the evening, a fever of relief when you do. And now with money besides!" He rubbed his warped hands.

"Peace, fool! 'T has been a black day," said Canardin.

"With a thousand livres!"

"They will go quickly enough. But to-day, Bonbouche"—Canardin paused for a long gaze out through the cobwebbed window—"to-day, for once, I saw something I may never have."

"No pretty woman, certainly! If once Canardin should fix his eye upon one ——" The old man ceased abruptly. One glance of Canardin's eye, fixed upon him, had set him to shivering.

At once, by way of softening his savagery,

Canardin related the morning's proceedings, to the vast amusement of his willing lackey. "Nevertheless," the old one sighed at the end of it, "I am glad *that* droll adventure is over!"

"It is not yet over!" said Canardin. "You forget a little matter like the *lettre de cachet.*"

"What! No, master! For a mere scrap of paper you would return to that place? They will have it trebly guarded! It is putting your head into the very noose itself! I am sure Monsieur de Braille never meant it. He has forgotten it already."

"I fear so myself," said Canardin sadly. "All the same, I mean to make sure about that 'mere scrap of paper.' If he has not forgotten —— If once I get that little strip of paper ——"

In the swift procession of his moods, Canardin felt the need of pacing the length of his garret, springing on the tips of his toes, as if lifted into the air by a soaring idea. By that touch alone, however, was his inward excitement expressed. What would have moved other men to paroxysms of exultation, in Canardin stirred ironic melancholy. "With that mere scrap of paper, as you call it, my beloved Bonbouche," he said sadly. "I believe I shall lay all dross of self aside. It is true that I never have relieved any but knaves

of their ill-gotten gains. At the same time I must own it was plunder, and for my own profit. But now, Bonbouche!" Canardin drew himself up proudly before the old fellow, always puzzled by these flashes of wild irony in his master. "Now I am a servant of the King! I no longer plunder; I confiscate!—in his honored name! But quick!" the outburst ended in quiet laughter. "The response must measure up to the duties! My best rapier, Bonbouche! Tumble out the whole wardrobe, while you're about it!"

Wondering what new terror was afoot, the old servant proceeded to open one chest after another as he was bidden, to a steady stream of expressions of disgust from his chief.

"What, fool! The best we have? It is nothing but rubbish! Lavallais would never forgive me for such a vulgar misuse of his identity! To the dump with it all! Duty demands a suitable dress for itself! The blessings of Providence on old Joumette! Thanks to his timely aid I'll pale Morbihan himself this week. Friday night! 'Tis not long to wait. Three days."

"'Tis Woman at last!" Bonbouche bowed his head in resignation, then raised it in such terror that, for errands upon his master, he was totally

useless, as he heard Canardin unfold his plans for the night.

"Hold your tongue, knave!" Canardin sought to halt his lamentations.

"Master, you are mad! It is Woman. I know it! Nothing else could so addle your wits!"

"Have done! Where else, fool, could I be so secure as under the personal protection of the Governor of Paris!"

Seeing his old servitor reduced to a pulp of helplessness, Canardin himself boldly dared the busy streets of Paris by daylight, a procedure more venturesome now than in the earlier hours of the day, because Trevours, goaded to greater fury than ever by Canardin's foray of the night before under the very nose of his vigilance, had caused a general alarm to be spread, and everywhere his men were on the watch.

Dusk was at hand before it suited Canardin's fancy, or his notion of prudence, to return to the loft. So captivated was Bonbouche, however, by the appearance of his master when he came, that almost the sly fellow was reconciled to the wild new exploit which justified and required such a costume. "It is no *lettre de cachet* he's after!" the old man inwardly raved. "It is Woman! The end of our prosperity has come!"

And by no means unjustified were Bonbouche's suspicions. It was evident enough that Canardin, in the choice of his garments, had been urged by some purpose more stirring than the mere need of disguise. Except for his stockings of a heavy black silk, he was garbed in velvet, of the deepest of bottomless blues. This would have had a somber effect but for the paler blue of his cocked hat, the sweeping white plume that graced it, the falls of snowy lace at his bosom and wrists, and the bright sparkle of stones on the buckles of his shoes and the hilt of his rapier. Nothing is more noticeable than a studied simplicity, and by that very fact had Canardin's taste been governed. When the daring mood was upon him, Canardin would set no bounds to his daring! Not a flash of color distracted the eye from the man who elected to stand forth for what he was in that composition. It not simply invited, it forced the question, "Who is that man?"

"This goes?" said Canardin, parading before Bonbouche with ironically mincing steps in his high, red-heeled shoes.

"It goes!" Bonbouche agreed, readily enough.

"Then so do I. It needs a test. Forget the ague to-night, old boar. I shall be well enough looked after. Even on Friday night, outside the

Palais, in the crowd looking on at the revels of others, there will be a few who are not such fools —do you understand? Our friends the usurers may expect a few attentions. More coins to your coffers, old miser! And at the Palais Royal, during the course of the ball, a lackey shall announce me—*as Canardin.* Au revoir!" And Canardin vanished.

Utter darkness had come. By a circuitous route Canardin emerged on a corner where stood the coach he had ordered to wait for him there. At the best pace of the nags he had himself driven at once to the house of De Braille. Scarcely, in his heart of hearts, had Canardin dared to base a hope of such a thing as a *lettre de cachet* on the careless and probably forgotten promise of De Braille. He mounted the steps a little sick of his errand. What was his boundless surprise, therefore, on discovering that the light-hearted secretary had been neither remiss nor flagging in energy. The magical paper, the verbal thunderbolt of royal forging, was ready for him. With due ceremony Canardin received it of an awe-struck clerk. It cost him an effort to forget his haste and remember his dignity as he descended De Braille's steps to reënter his coach.

Just as he was about to step into it, it was

whisked away on a sharp order, and Canardin, standing speechless at the curb, found himself confronted by a numerous guard, personally commanded by the impressive figure of Trevours, who now stepped close.

"Monsieur!" came his booming voice. "I must ask an explanation!"

"Monsieur!" Canardin drew himself up haughtily, bolder than ever with a certain new weapon in his possession. "I *demand* an explanation!"

"Is it possible that you do not know who I am?"

"I would say the same of yourself, Monsieur!"

"You are a stranger to Paris!"

"As truth is a stranger to fiction!"

This remark appeared to baffle the Governor of Paris and to heighten his suspicion. "The occupant of this house is absent."

"That is profoundly true," said Canardin. "Monsieur, will you have the goodness to state your errand and have done with it?"

Trevours's hand reached out as if itching to take hold of Canardin, but he seemed to think better of it. Evidently he was nonplussed by the dress and bearing of the man before him.

"Monsieur," he boomed, "a man of your height was here this morning!"

Meanwhile, now that they had their man, some of the soldiery lighted torches, to help along the proceedings. Trevours would have been as happy had they not done so. He was forced to look into the most taunting smile that impudence had ever flung at his grandeur. For an old recollection had been confirmed in Canardin. This gorgeous policeman, formidable as he had become, still suffered, it was clear, from the ancient handicap of a lack of wit. Evidently life itself had availed no more than Clermont to sharpen the noisy Trevours. "What is more," the Governor of Paris was booming, "I distinctly heard that man mention the name of Canardin this morning!"

"You probably did." Canardin put on the dryest of notarial accents. "I had just been closeted with my colleague, De Braille, on the very subject of Canardin. And now, the somewhat noticeable marks of your importance entitle me to the belief, Monsieur, that I have the honor to greet his worship, the Governor of Paris. Am I mistaken?"

"Aha! Then you know very well who I am!"

"I am satisfied, Monsieur," Canardin looked

him over again, "that no other would so aptly look the part and fill the office!"

At this Trevours had wit enough to doubt for a moment whether he had not listened to something insulting. He chose to be complimented instead, and drew himself higher than ever, as if to place his identity even farther beyond mistake, if that were possible. "Now will Monsieur be good enough to give me his name?" he said, somewhat mollified.

Canardin laughed outright. "Monsieur," he said, "your behavior is a little out of the ordinary. You ask as if you expected me to tell you my name is Monsieur Canardin! Whereas I had hoped to be rememberd without the aid of a reminder."

Again Trevours suspected some subtle assault upon his intelligence, and reverted again to his usual defence of bullying gruffness. "Well, well, Monsieur! I have no taste for sly speech! The name, if you please!"

"My dear Trevours!" said Canardin. "Is it possible that you do not recall your old schoolmate at Clermont, Armand de Lavallais?" And Canardin stretched forth his hand.

Trevours released it quickly, with a measure of contempt. To him notaries were dangerous

creatures, political pests, uncomfortably cunning, little better than Canardin himself. And this one, to judge by his sudden improvement in dress over that of the morning, was the more dangerous because rich. "Ah, yes, yes, Armand," he said coolly, after another of those piercing glances at Canardin which were only natural to the first watchdog of France. "Of a surety. I knew you at once. Though it is years since we met." Trevours was beginning to feel uncomfortable in front of his men. Hence he boomed louder than ever, "But you understand. In my position one cannot afford to be deceived. Never! Not for a moment!"

At this unusual commotion in the quiet street a crowd had begun to collect at a safe distance. Seeing this, Canardin himself spoke in a clearer tone. "Is it really possible, my dear Trevours," he said as if aggrieved, "that you took me for the notorious Canardin! Am I to understand that you have never yet seen the fellow!"

Once more Trevours started angrily, at a suspicion that here was another of those digs at a bluff, honest man. "Well, well, Armand. As you will. One takes no chances, that's all. Clermont, yes. But be reminded that Canardin himself was at Clermont. Clermont did nothing

to make a dove of that hawk!" He started to move away.

"Clermont was a dovecote, wasn't it? Eh, Trevours?" Canardin held him boldly. "As you and I well know!"

The Governor of Paris responded with something in the nature of a grin.

"Do you recall, Trevours, that occasion when you and I plastered the principal's chair with pitch, in the certainty that it would be held—as it was—against Canardin, thanks to the name he had got already for his pranks? There was once, Trevours, when you scored on Canardin!"

The Governor's smile gained something in ferocity.

"And the lacing you were privileged to give him for your own fault—there was something, Trevours, that should console you for all the merry pranks that Canardin has since then played upon you! Eh?"

Still again the Governor of Paris started at the tickle of edged words against his tough wits. And was suitably stung. "Curse the impudent rascal! I will say he has led me a dance of late! But there will be an end to his audacities! Mark me, I shall have him in the end!"

"Would you scorn a—a little assistance, my dear Trevours?"

"What! Yours?" A smile, if it could be called such, reappeared on the Governor's face.

"If you remember, I said this morning I had been closeted with my colleague, De Braille," Canardin said more confidentially. "It was his earnest wish that I should fly at once to you. And I was just on my way to bring you the benefits of my advice when you happily arrived—with your ample guard. That guard, by the way, Trevours—at the very outset it is a grievous mistake. It too plainly publishes the news of your presence. So that from the noise you take with you, Canardin will always know your whereabouts and govern himself accordingly. Better be rid of it."

"By my mother's soul, a sage suggestion! I never would have thought of it, with my dignities to support as I have. But no!" Still again Trevours was a prey to suspicion. "I doubt not that was a thought of De Braille's, the jealous ninny! He wants to see me robbed of my dignities!"

"Be rid of that guard, my dear Trevours. Observe the crowd collected in the street already, every beggar of them gaping in curiosity. Be

sure that crowd is dotted with Canardin's spies. They are everywhere. Drawn by your pomp and keeping an eye on you. How will you ever put salt on that bird's tail when you tread so heavily!"

"Well spoken! Ho, Drouet! Captain! Be off. Till I send for you." When the obedient guard with its torches had moved away, Trevours turned to Canardin, more comfortable in the greater darkness. "Perhaps we had better be indoors, out of sight. De Braille was expecting me."

"Another fatal error, Trevours, with your pardon," said Canardin sententiously. "Enter this house, and Canardin's lieutenants will have him posted in a minute as to where you are, whilst he brings off some daring stroke in an opposite quarter."

"But my friend, what would you! You have just warned me that my guard makes me too conspicuous, so that the rogue always knows where I am!"

"Far be it from me, my dear Trevours, to teach you when to be seen, and when not. Your own discretion must be your guide. Keep this in mind, however!" Canardin now whispered. "Canardin will never be taken by force, but only

by stratagem. Appear in public, and he naturally retires. Enter a house, and he has you precisely placed. And there you are. As you may have observed, Trevours, it is to be a battle of wits. In such a contest I am sure you will come out ahead—if you hurry. I warn you it may take patience, however. That Canardin will have his fling!"

"By my faith," Trevours said, more confidentially, "it would not surprise me if the fellow rifled my bureau while I am away!"

"Ay, Trevours, on the word of good Jean de Braille himself, that Canardin, it would seem, has set all Paris laughing."

"At me, you mean? De Braille himself said that? It was what he meant, I'll be bound, the jealous jackanapes!"

Inwardly Canardin was convulsed with merriment as he hurried this cumbersome intelligence now this way, now that. "There, my dear Trevours," he said, as with the sincerest sympathy, "is the whole hitch o' the matter. There lies the puzzle for you. It is not Canardin alone that you have to deal with, but Paris itself. You well know how it insists upon being amused. And I fancy that clever Canardin has guessed as much, and will plague you accordingly."

Here the native terrors of Trevours's countenance dissolved into a look of positive dismay.

Relentlessly Canardin plied it on. "And this at the very moment, as our dear Jean tells me, when the King looks to you the most anxiously for the promptest riddance of the rogue. His Majesty takes the jest to have run on quite enough."

"Does he, does he? What—what would you counsel me to do? You notaries know everything. What does De Braille advise?"

Now Canardin felt he could toy with his man. "Listen to me, my good Trevours," he said impressively, clearing his throat. "Do you know, for example, the precise whereabouts of Canardin at this moment?"

"That is to say, Armand, that you yourself know?" Trevours said eagerly. "Where is he?"

"I hardly dare risk a conjecture," said Canardin, in the familiar dry tone. "That, at this particular moment, is his own affair. But I have singularly exact information as to where he will be in a day or two. Perhaps Friday night. That was my errand with you. It occurred to me that we might exchange all the knowledge we possess between us. I can then compare your plans for

his capture with my positive knowledge as to where Canardin shall be."

"Excellent! Splendid! A bare moment inside will do us no harm. Come! Perhaps De Braille will have valuable suggestions ——"

"He has just left, to keep an imperative appointment."

"At the royal command?"

"Oh," said Canardin, with such point that Trevours was freshly perturbed, "I am sure the command was royal!"

"That means I must act at once!" said the Governor. "Friday night? No!"—he hesitated, with a wry smile—"that cannot be! Not Friday!"

"Ah," said Canardin, "you had an expedition planned for Friday night?"

"Not that sort of expedition!" laughed Trevours. "Suppose we make it for to-morrow night. Canardin will then be in the neighborhood of Meaux, I am told."

"Waiting, of course, to keep the rendezvous with you! Make it Friday night without fail, my dear Trevours. Canardin will then be"—the rogue hesitated, and finished—"elsewhere."

"You are sure?"

"I am positive."

"My men have other information. How do you know?"

"My dear Trevours! It happens that I have devoted my life to Canardin. That man's shadow and I have rarely been wider apart than that!" Canardin snapped his fingers.

The Governor drew himself to his fullest height and answered in a superior manner, "Many have said as much!"

"Oh, understand me!" the generous Canardin granted. "Canardin must be a slight matter amid the Governor's other cares."

With a grave nod the Governor of Paris signaled that at last he himself had been understood.

"Others," said Canardin, "are constantly juggling for your exalted place."

There the Governor winced.

"That, Trevours, is why I have come to Paris. I said to myself, 'It is a scandal, no less, that the good Trevours should be made a laughing-stock to all France, because of this mere comedian, Canardin! Before the Governor knows it,' I said, 'some designing knave will have his station away from him.'"

"Do you really think so, Armand!" Trevours's perturbation deepened.

"Trevours, we folk from the country are not the simpletons that Paris delights to think us. Even there we have heard that unless Canardin is soon captured, your dignities, the reward of years of the kicks you have received and given about the Court"—Canardin spoke the rest more loudly—"will be in jeopardy."

"Is it possible!" gasped Trevours. "Come, let us go in where we may be more in private. But what—what am I to do! Curse the fellow!" His alarm took refuge in anger. "I have turned all Paris upside down. Clue after clue I have followed. And he isn't there! Damme if I don't believe the rascal has supplied the clues himself!"

"That," said Canardin gravely, "is quite possible. Here. Come. On second thought I have something," he snapped, as if swayed by some generous impulse. "Something not for the ears of lackeys. Come."

"Have you?" Trevours said eagerly, suffering himself to be escorted to the top of the flight and to the dark shadows of the entry to De Braille's house—not, however, wholly out of sight from the street. It was not in Canardin's thought, even at that quiet hour of the day, to let slip the soundest position he had yet attained—by the

side, and under the protection of the Governor of Paris.

"Listen, Trevours," he said, with an air of the greatest caution. "Guard well what I am moved to tell you. Put away your appointment on Friday night with the fair one. She will not desert you just for that—whilst Canardin may. You will be the best judge of this clue that I have. How much it is worth I do not know. My own information was that Canardin was to be at Issy. But from a source I am not apt to question, it has been whispered that on Friday night Canardin will attempt a stroke bolder than any before. At a point which you would be the last to guess."

"My own apartment, I'll wager! Whilst I am away. 'Twould be just like him to plague me like that. To raise a laugh at my expense."

"That," said Canardin, "may well come, later. This hint of mine has it, nevertheless, that on Friday night Canardin will aim, not to raise laughter, but, Trevours, to *strike consternation.* It will be in the very neighborhood of the King himself!"

"*Versailles?*" Trevours whispered loudly.

"As I said, Trevours; Versailles, no less. So, at least, runs the hint I have received. 'Twould be quite in key with his bravado. But for my-

self I scarcely believe it. My own guess is that he will stop at Issy."

"Issy? What is there for Canardin at Issy! No, I am sure it is Versailles. 'Twould be just like him!"

"Issy, I think."

"No, Versailles! Armand, I am undone!"

"Nonsense, my dear Trevours. There is your opportunity! What better could you wish! There he is, in the very neighborhood of your King. And there, Trevours, you take him! There, under the very eyes of Majesty itself, where none can rob you of your glory! Instantly your sagacity is vindicated, you are restored to royal favor. What more could one ask!"

The Governor of Paris slapped his thigh over this entrancing picture of himself on the crest of glory. "Armand, I shall have him!"

"Take your shrewdest men. The very shrewdest. Even though you have to strip Paris."

"I will take five hundred!"

"The park is a large place. You will need them all."

"A thousand!"

"Good! Be on the move at once. Place yourself at their head. Leave no wood uncombed along the way. Girdle the royal park with a

human wall. And by the stroke of twelve you should have your quarry in hand for good and all."

"Provided"—for a moment Trevours enjoyed this prospect, and then finished—"provided he is there!"

"Rumor alone, Trevours," said Canardin, barely able to suppress laughter outright, "is sufficient to take you there. The King will applaud such energy in his protection, such sleepless vigilance. At the lightest alarm you have flown to guard him! Besides, Trevours—suppose Canardin *were* there?"

"True! It is true!"

"And to allow for any contingency, I have a stratagem of my own. On Friday night I will go myself to Issy. Few will know or care if Armand de Lavallais makes a fool of himself. But as I am a thoughtful rather than a daring man, I will ask you for a guard."

"The favor is yours—an even return! Forty men! The cunningest foxes at my command!"

"They would only embarrass me."

"Fifty, then! A hundred!"

"A single one would do. There is one in particular that I had in mind."

"He shall be one of the fifty. You have only to name him."

"His name," said Canardin, with great notarial simplicity, "I am told is Monsieur Julie."

Trevours first uttered a low whistle of amazement. His mental processes next worked forward to a milder astonishment, expressed in a gasp. Last of all he laughed boisterously at this egregious simpleton. "*Julie?*" he said. "Julie 'his' name?" he laughed on—and then sobered suddenly. "See here! De Braille put you up to that, I'll warrant! Julie, my dear Armand, is —Julie! Julie Lecoigneux! Wait!"

The Governor of Paris fumbled about his frilled bosom for a moment busily and at last drew forth a miniature upon which Canardin beheld the precise image which had sent De Braille into such raptures a few hours before. And the raptures of Trevours resembled those of De Braille as the miniatures themselves were precisely alike. "The merriest little minx at Court!" Trevours at last came to a close. "In all Paris! In all France! And the quickest wit in the world! You might well consider your ranks full, if she were among them! And what a prank she would think it! I have it!" Once more Trevours slapped his thigh, that being the

manner in which thought was most apt to express itself in him. "She shall go! On Friday night. In your hands, Lavallais, she would be as safe as in a nunnery!"

"Thanks," said Canardin.

"Oh, this is capital!" But suddenly Trevours's merriment shaded again into beefy cunning, and thence into his professionally suspicious nature. "Armand, I see it! You have been cruelly played upon. De Braille has wanted me out of his way on Friday night, in order to have the lady to himself. He has taken advantage of your simplicity. 'Twas he put you up to this, I'll wager. To break up my rendezvous. It is the night of the Palais ball. She has promised me every quadrille. Very well! We'll forestall Monsieur de Braille! If I must be at Versailles on Friday night, she shall be with you at Issy!"

"In one matter, however, Trevours, be prudent, please," Canardin stipulated, with a show of embarrassment. "Promise me that you will not inform the lady who I am."

"Aha! Armand!" Trevours nudged him. "The other lady might hear of it, eh?"

"You are shrewd, Trevours!" Canardin laughed. "It might annoy my fiancée, Cécile—

Cécile ——" For a moment Canardin struggled to remember the name.

"You are affianced!" Trevours caught him up. "To Cécile de Grammont? All the better, if I know that lady! You are as safe as a church! You will cherish my Julie as you would a daughter!"

"Yes," sighed Canardin. "I suppose that will be the way of it."

"Now one condition I make myself," said Trevours. "Morbihan shall not be of your party."

"I am content," Canardin assented cheerfully enough.

"In any company soever that little minx Julie can well take care of herself—as you will quickly find, my dear fellow! Except with Morbihan, curse him! He stops at nothing!"

"Has Morbihan, also, a miniature?" asked Canardin, with Lavallais's own simplicity.

"What? Morbihan!" Trevours laughed heartily. "Not he, my dear Armand. Not but that he'd sell his soul to own one. I, Armand, have the only one—as there is only one Julie!" He laid his hat across his heart. "Both, both are mine."

As the Governor of Paris clearly had much more to say on this point, Canardin recalled sud-

denly that he had important affairs to conclude elsewhere. Especially as matters had now shaped themselves, almost of their own accord, so nearly to his liking. The point and hour were duly fixed when Mademoiselle Lecoigneux was to be committed to Canardin's protection, along with the guard appointed to assist him in the improbable capture of himself at Issy. And so, as it now seemed to Canardin that he might await the course of events with a certain measure of confidence, he left Trevours and went his way. The evening and the night of Friday, but two days hence, promised a certain prospect of amusement.

Even the two days intervening, Canardin's wits prompted him, were subject to profitable employment. It might be more than merely beguiling to have an eye on Lavallais and discover what use that fellow was making, not so much of the thousand pistoles, as of his knowledge and his time. The amusements of the ensuing Friday might exceed even Canardin's anticipation, if the other Lavallais took it into his head to be also at the party. Which is precisely what occurred.

CHAPTER V

THE true and only Lavallais presented himself at the Palais rout for an excellent reason. It was the wish of a pretty and imperious lady.

Thanks to funds supplied him by the first thief of France, this votary of the law and relentless enemy of his benefactor found himself handsomely reclothed, his purse replenished, the fatal debt discharged, and the prospects of his happy and highly fortunate marriage restored. The one gift that Canardin had withheld was a plausible story of how all this had fallen about.

The more Lavallais thought of this, the more ardently the honest fellow cursed his poor gifts as a liar and wished he had taxed Canardin for this final boon. However greatly Monsieur Lavallais loved a certain pair of large blue eyes, already he had found them able to question sharply. And though his mind raced almost as fast as his lathered nag, the very turrets to Cécile's abode seemed to accuse him as he approached.

Cécile de Grammont dwelt with her guardian

uncle in perhaps the most exquisitely ordered of the smaller châteaux, near Meaux, pitched on a hillside on the Paris side of the Marne and overlooking its matchless valley. The great hall of this château kept its memories of the several occasions when no less a person than Monsieur Molière, supported by his troupe, played his merry pieces there. The place was the scene of constant entertainment. And even Monsieur Canardin had been known to make it the point of one of his informal visits.

Fancy, therefore, the agitation felt by Monsieur Lavallais as he arrived, thus early in the afternoon, at the dwelling of his dear lady! How shall he sit calmly in his chair, there in the great hall with its many carven seats, its tall candles, its walls of Gobelin tapestries, its floors velvet to the foot with the richest rugs from the East! With pounding heart he listens for the first intimations of her footsteps on the stair. And then the moment when she enters!

Can you not see the slim figure, in the mouse-gray robe, with the dainty laces at her wrists and throat, a little dimly outlined against the tapestries at that darker end of the room? A bit blinded at first, Mademoiselle Cécile faces the windows to see who it is has come, and seeing,

she runs on the tips of her toes, her delicate oval face sharpening in feature and outline as it rushes into the light. The saucy lips part over the whitest of teeth; the dark eyes widen in surprise and gladness; and she flies into his arms.

"Armand! Oh, Armand, it is you!" Women's weeping is seldom logical, and it is there, at the very beginning, that Cécile tosses to the winds Monsieur Lavallais's guide and compass. "There, there, my own," she explains after a time. "It is because I am so glad—when I thought you were lost to me." And so far all is well.

It would be such a pleasure to spangle this poor paper with all the pretty words she used, the catchings of her breath, her little gasps of endearment. Alas, the happy cries she uttered are not to be caught in words. It must do to say, in this cold fashion, that a little French demoiselle, who loved and thought her lover lost, had found him again. She made him sit down, she crouched at his feet, and listened all over again to the story of his devotion, upon which he dwelt again and yet again.

Nevertheless, as many may have observed, a woman's curiosity is one of the constant forces of Nature. It never slumbers for long. Hence

it was that after a time Cécile was certain to raise those questioning eyes of hers and propose the dread question.

"Ah, you are with me again, Armand, my dear. But tell me, how did you do it? Such a dreadful sum of money! How ever did you raise it in time?"

For answer the shivering Lavallais could think of nothing better than to draw from his wallet the magical receipt for the debt and wave it before her eyes and let it speak for itself. It was not enough.

"Then that awful ogre is paid! Let me see. Yes, it is true." The mischievous Cécile pressed the slip of paper to her heart. "Now we can go to uncle together. Come, let us fly! Armand, you are wonderful! But wait. Tell me. How *did* you do it? And in just six days! My brave Armand! Ah, my dear, I knew you could and would. For me. But how was it done? It must be a wondrous tale."

What could poor Lavallais do but make a wry face and as wry an answer! "Indeed," he faltered, truthfully enough, "it has been a passing strange adventure."

Whether it was the beauties of Nature at that season of the year, or whether it was need of

more room for his great love, that drew Lavallais's feet to the tree-shaded park, need set no problem; there it was that he asked Cécile to walk a while and hear yet again his vows of devotion. Long and sweetly he strung it out, yet sweet as this was to the lady, that practical turn to her nature, which Lavallais never had respected more than now, was not long in returning to the thousand pistoles. And be it to the credit of the fellow, he told her the truth, and told it all,—especially as it seemed, though he said nothing of it at the time, that she had a surprising knowledge already of what had befallen.

"I suppose," he faltered at the end of it, "I should never have gone to Canardin's refuge and got the money. Still, it was logical."

"Ah, yes, you should! I'm so glad that you did!" cried Cécile, suddenly disclosing to Lavallais a new and astonishing logic of her own, which he instantly recognized as vastly superior. "The money? It is nothing but money! We'll call it a loan, as he says. At the proper time we can easily repay it. But tell me more." Still more tightly Mademoiselle Cécile clasped the arm of Lavallais, whose relief was now so great. "How very, very droll, his leaving you nothing

to put on but his own clothing! And you say he is so cynical toward women! And this—this is his very ring!"

She toyed with the odd trinket which Lavallais had placed even then, incontinently, upon her finger. "To think that you have actually seen the real Canardin! And talked with him! What is he like? I was so sorry to miss him when he was here last week."

"What! Canardin—*here?*"

"Yes," said Cécile proudly. "Didn't you know? He took away all of my poor Mama's ugly old brooches and rings. But he left me in place of them the most beautiful cluster of wild orchids! It was so thoughtful of him. Tell me, Armand, is he so terrible? Most wonderful of all, you were the means of saving his life! You have made too little of that part, my dear. Is he really so amusing?"

"I—I rather suspect, my own, that you are just a bit infatuated with Canardin."

"Jealous boy! I'm in love with Canardin, of course! Haven't I reason to be? Because"—she raised her beautiful eyes, so trustful and so mischievous—"he has given you back to me."

So they threaded the paths in the park, while a summer's sun set upon them without their

notice. A second time Lavallais was obliged to give his account of Canardin's entry into his lodging, before her curiosity was appeased. She demanded the most particular description of his air, his appearance. She laughed more merrily than ever at a second round of quotations from Canardin's humorous philosophy. The truth is, though Cécile listened most attentively during Armand's recital, she was busy with a good many thoughts of her own meanwhile, as she disclosed a moment later.

"How very amusing!" she exclaimed. "The great thief and the great lawyer lying down together! Chums for a night! And now you are to take up the chase again!" Stooping beside the way, Cécile plucked the reddest of red roses and laid it to her lips, unafraid of the comparison, and not forgetting an arch look at Lavallais to see if he were jealous of it. "Of course you will catch him, Armand, dear. Do you know why? For the same reason that you captured me."

"Only, he will be the more easily taken!" Lavallais fetched out rather grimly.

"You will catch him," Cécile laughed heartily. "Because you have a strength that is greater than all the cleverness and daring of Canardin.

Do you know what it is?" She glanced up at him archly. "It is your patience. It is terrible, that patience. You used to make me fearfully angry, do you know? I might flirt as I pleased, but always you had that confidence of yours. I gave in to you myself because"—she sighed—"I saw there was no hope for me. You are modest and sweet, Armand; but oh, that patience of yours! Besides, I am beginning to think you have something else in your favor."

"Oh, certainly I shall capture Canardin," Lavallais laughed in irony, "if only I live long enough, and if only he will consent not to get himself hanged or shot in the meantime! But what is the something else I have in my favor?"

"Catch him you will, as you shall see, Armand," thus Cécile ignored his open bid for more flattery! It happens that Armand was not present in her busy thoughts just then. "But to what end will you capture him, pray—that man? Just for your own reputation, your own advancement? Would you take his life in order to make yours? After what he has done for you—and for me? Ah, no, you are not so base! Armand, listen to me."

Indeed Armand listened with interest, and

amusement too, to this airy talk of Canardin's capture, as if it were imminent on the morrow.

Being near to a rustic arbor in the garden, itself near the château, and so under the watchful eye of the duenna who eternally kept Cécile under a gentle oversight, the young demoiselle seated herself and drew Lavallais to a place beside her.

"Let us capture him, yes," she was saying—saying very, very seriously indeed. "But to what end? To be strung up on the gibbet? To be broken on the wheel? No! No! What a fate for a brain so clever, a heart so warm, a spirit so daring!"

"Dismiss your alarms, my dear Cécile! Your beloved Canardin is in no need of your tears!" Lavallais laughed at her. "You speak of him as if he were only a fox, to be caught in any trap." Then, seeing the hurt in her eyes, he hastened to say more seriously, "How little you know your Canardin! Think of what he is! Of what he has done! Truly, my dear Cécile, such deeds as his must not go unrebuked. It is bad for ——"

"One moment, Armand. It is bad for France not to punish such misdeeds. It is worse for France not to make use of such talents."

"A pretty philosophy, surely! If only feminine fancies ——"

"Yes, I know, my dear Armand; but wait till you have heard me! He is a man of brains, you tell me, your Monsieur Canardin. He must be, to accomplish what he does in the face of such desperate odds. You say he rails at our society. That is not because he is truly wicked. What if he is in revolt against us! It is because of a wounded pride."

"A wise little head you have on your shoulders, Cécile! And that heart does you credit. I only wish I could be so sanguine. But that wild revolt in Canardin—it is not so easily quelled."

"You forget, Armand"—and here came the arch glance again—"that I have you to believe in. And perhaps there's something else besides."

"Ah, yes; that 'something else!' What is it, please?"

"Armand!" As part of the feminine acceptance of logic it was essential here that Cécile should rest her mist of tawny tresses against Lavallais's shoulder. "Do you think I am charming? Really? You've said so, of course. But"—she looked up, blushes and all—"is it true?"

"Cécile!"

"Yes, but is it true?"

"Of course it is true! But why do you ask?"

"Armand, you—you said he was unused to a woman's wiles?"

"Cécile! You little know what you say! That wild hawk? It is unthinkable!"

"I am not so sure."

"Cécile! Have you conceived a silly girl's wrong-headed notion of that man?"

"No. I merely love him. And for precisely the reason I gave you. Because he gave you back to me. Everything tells me your Canardin is a man. And isn't it my duty to help you catch him—in my own way? What sort of wife should I be to you otherwise?" This sounded suspiciously like logic, to begin with, and Cécile proceed to amplify it. As might be expected in her case, the argument, nevertheless, opened with the word "Because."

"Because I'll tell you," Cécile now began in earnest, with still more blushes, but with additions to her years and her wisdom that astonished Lavallais. "In your Canardin I recognize an unmistakable Frenchman. In no great while you are to take your place in France, and I am to be your wife. And I wonder whether we shall

be better friends of France than that man you are pleased to call a wild hawk! I know how I should behave if I had brains and a spirit like his. All that I am I owe to France. What that man is he owes to Nature alone. If I or you had a spirit like his, a measure of courage, a breadth of humor like his——" Cécile let the lolling head on Lavallais's shoulder express the rest. "Frenchmen like that we send to the gallows! We drop their bodies in the sewer! To-morrow, or very soon, they will catch him. To-day Achille de Morbihan was here, along with De Braille. Julie also is with me. That, of course, explains it!" Cécile laughed. "And they talked of that man Canardin, all of them, as if he were a partridge. A bit of game. A pestilence, a plague, to be stamped out. A fox to be baited. It amazed me, what they know of him. And very soon I learned where they got their information. Will you believe it, Julie had it! That hoyden cousin of mine! She knows everything; she gets everywhere. The fool who dares to affront her has a dozen rapiers aimed at his heart, and the little minx knows it. Her pretty ears are simply hoppers that gather every bit of gossip in France. Long before you got here with that miser's receipt, I knew from her that you had it, and

whence you got the thousand pistoles! The little mischief is as clever as she is bloodthirsty. It's merely the fashion, according to her. Every one in Paris is amusing himself by pursuit of Canardin. And making forty other Canardins every hour!" Cécile ended.

"H'm, my dear," Lavallais reflected. "Only making it the more amusing to our friend Canardin, I should say."

"For the time, perhaps. But what can he do against France! Funloving France, stalking its best brains! Do you wonder that a Frenchwoman, like myself, is indignant!"

What Lavallais did not wonder at was that a Frenchwoman like Cécile should be a bit jealous of another Frenchwoman like Julie. This he kept to himself, however, and said instead, "Being the best of French brains, I rather fancy Canardin may be trusted to take care of himself!"

"Not to hear that little Julie! When he's caught, I suppose she'll very properly shudder at her work. Just now it's no more to her than a move at chess, against the men. Being nineteen, she knows no better. Being clever, she can be told no better. And to play with such fire in the France you and I know—the France outside

of Paris! For the good of the realm that man Canardin must be 'captured' in a different fashion. Outside of Paris he's the idol of the country. If they hang that man, they'll have the other half of France to hang with him! Captured, yes! He must be! And who but you, Armand"—Cécile looked up at him—"are the man to do it, you who know him so well."

"Just like that!" Lavallais playfully snapped his fingers at this easy undertaking.

Cécile had a counter for him. "That's how the others take his capture!" she said. "Will you let them beat you? Already they have returned to Paris. Even Julie is preparing to follow. Stay with me a while, Armand; then ——" Cécile now bristled up, perhaps the most practical of all Canardin's captors. "Then off you go. To find him, I'm sure. I count upon you. And to be ahead of them. You know his haunts as well as they. Or better. You have actually talked with him—as not one of them has. You will do something with him, because you come to him on a better errand. It is a game between you! And think of the stakes!—the reward, if you return that man to France!"

The excellence of this philosophy there was no

gainsaying, as Lavallais held it off in review—as philosophy.

"Your supper first, of course!" Cécile encouraged him—not quite successfully.

With or without supper, the reduction of that philosophy to fact was enough to put a wry face on any man. Whereupon the proud beauty took it on herself to quicken her Armand's meditations.

"Am I to understand, Monsieur Lavallais," she said, not quite playfully, either, "that your Cécile alone is not a sufficient reward to you?"

There Lavallais truly started. "Cécile! You mean that reward is to be reserved until ——?"

"Since you have furnished me with the idea, Monsieur," Cécile laughed wickedly, "let's have it so!"

"But, my own! I begrudge you nothing! You know it! At least cut your demands down to the possible!"

"Canardin's capture must come before mine!" she plagued him, so that it was almost impossible to doubt her. Indeed, there is no knowing how far she might have carried her cruelty, but for an unexpected diversion.

"Now who's baiting a clever Frenchman!" they heard an even more merry and mischievous

voice. And out of the gathering dusk, from somewhere on the lawn about them, a flying figure consisting, as it approached, chiefly of a mass of tossing ringlets, flung itself on the grass at their feet, and the mocking smile of Julie Lecoigneux looked them over.

CHAPTER VI

THE mocking laugh ended in words even more mocking. "And what reward shall I have, dear cousin, if I bring him myself? Let us say we have him here next Saturday morning. And not a hair missing from his head. Your darling Canardin, no less."

"Hear the child! She's mad on the subject!" Cécile laughed, reaching out for a handful of those ringlets, as Julie tossed them out of range. "At least she pretends to be. It's only to plague Morbihan and De Braille."

"And you!" Julie added, with such a volume of mysterious laughter as proved her point. "Come, what do you say, Cécile? Let's have it. What's to be my reward? With Canardin here on Saturday next?"

"A spanking, whether you bring him or not."

Here Lavallais took up the matter. "I'm perfectly willing to believe her," he said.

Out of her superior knowledge Julie was prepared to laugh, as she could well afford. Lavallais, however, had stopped her. "Indeed, my

friend," she said saucily. "And what, pray, do you know?"

"Nothing," said Lavallais, "except what I have gathered from Canardin." And there it was Cécile's part to laugh heartily.

"But I'm serious!" Julie protested, and even spoke it seriously.

"I can well believe it," said Lavallais. "My dear," he turned to Cécile, so that she was puzzled by his own sudden mockery of seriousness, "I am saved after all. Canardin will be here on Saturday. Does it matter to you which one of us brings him?"

In the deepening twilight Cécile studied first one of their faces, and then the other. "What have you two ——?" she began. But Lavallais the lover could ill endure her suspense, and fetched them back to laughter.

"If Canardin learns that Julie is to be here, he will be here himself. Of his own accord."

Julie leaped up for a little slap at his cheek. "You horrid thing!" she complained, but soon was dancing a mad little turn before them. "Very well, if you'll have it so, you pair of cooing doves! Just for your benefit I'll have a declaration out of your Canardin before it's over! To satisfy your craving for delicate sentiment!

Though I fancy my cousin "—she tapped Cécile's cheek this time—"would rather have that for herself! Who knows? It may be. As for my part"—the girl turned upon them a little fiercely —"I'm not a poor lover of France myself! Not the less so because I can't quite sentimentalize over an open and defiant outlaw! A pretty France we shall have if we make pets of such wild despoilers! There's only one thing in his favor."

The capricious thing had flung herself down on the turf again at Cécile's knees, with a foolish laugh.

"He's—he's so awfully clever!" she fetched out.

"Just what I say, my child!" Cécile caught up the point. "Quite too good to waste."

"He's worth one's efforts!"

"I'm glad you admit it, my dear!"

"He's led me one chase! But ——"

"But, what?"

Julie was even more livened now, and pointed at Lavallais. "Tell you what, Monsieur! It's a race between us! I'll wait till to-morrow. And give you your start to-night. Or any amount of start." Julie broke off to laugh out more of her merry mystery. "It's pathetic, the drakes he

has made of you men! Trevours? Oh, la!" She kissed her finger tips to the first twinkling stars, and then sobered again, so far as she was able. "We can toss for his soul with Cécile——"

"When we've got him," Lavallais finished for her. "It's rather wise to stipulate that," he laughed drily.

"Very good! What will you wager on that?" Julie was ready for him, and with such a show of confidence as freshly alarmed Cécile. "Out of your thousand pistoles?"

What Lavallais would have wagered against this mischief was left to question, for a lackey now appeared with a tray of chocolate, which at that hour they found very grateful. When they had drained their cups, the lackey said:

"Monsieur de Grammont, your uncle, Mademoiselle, asks me to remind you of the hour, and of the dampness."

"Thanks, Etienne! But Armand!" Cécile started at a hot drop on her wrist.

"I'm so sorry!" said Lavallais. "The tray was not where I thought it. Did I scald you?" He lifted the uninjured wrist to kiss it.

"Etienne! You will be more careful, please!" Cécile corrected the innocent instead of the guilty. "A new one who came this morning,"

she explained as the lackey moved away. "But one takes whatever comes, at this distance from Paris."

"One does!" said Lavallais.

The ladies, however, now thought of the hour, and not of odd tones in gentlemen's voices, and Cécile and Julie set off for the château without note of Lavallais's remark.

Other servants were in attendance on the supper table, and whatever it was that Lavallais had on his mind he suffered to rest there,—even as he later suffered himself to be later dismissed to Paris in one of the De Grammont coaches. Then it was, however, that a certain matter returned to his mind, not to be dispelled even by the prospect of his first real appearance in the circle of the Court, in Cécile's company, at the Palais Royal.

The undeniable likeness in that lackey's voice! The original, it is true, he had heard but once; but it was a voice ever afterward to be unmistakable. Could it be that Saturday itself was too far away for ——?

"Pshaw!" Lavallais reflected as he rode away. "Remarkable man, that Canardin. But that is too much, even for him!"

CHAPTER VII

"MONSIEUR, it is because I am an enemy to ennui."

If any one had stopped Canardin as he mounted the stair to the Palais Royal on that Friday night, with a question as to why he was risking himself to the open scrutiny of those who most ardently of all craved a grip at his neck, that, in all probability, would have been his answer.

A merely clever man in Canardin's shoes would have clung like a leech to a disguise already proved effective, and so would have passed as Armand de Lavallais. A very clever man would have remained away. As nothing mattered to Canardin except amusement and adventure, and as a certain acquaintance with adventure had taught him his powers, this opportunity was irresistible. Whether or not he was clever by birth, more than one awkward surprise in the past had taught him cleverness. And so, to give himself the proper latitude for his purpose, on entering the Palais he gave to the major-domo the name of

the Sieur Marcel de Brisac, Comte de Strasbourg.

This was a happy thought at the start. Once the proud name he gave was whispered about, Canardin became instantly the object of admiring attention as a distinguished visitor from the important new province. Dozens placed themselves in the way of an introduction to this Comte de Brisac, and gleaned the more marvelous information about Alsace because Canardin himself possessed none whatever about that region. So long as he was careful to avoid a too close contact with De Braille, not forgetting De Morbihan, Canardin was reasonably secure for a time. And his stay, in any case, was to be shortened by the fantastic errand to Issy.

A band of music played rondeaux, sarabandes, minuets, gavottes by Lully and Rameau, and much to the elation of the dancers the illustrious Lully himself led the players. Countless others of note were there,—painters, poets, dramatists, statesmen, great beauties, great gallants, great fops.

"At last," said Canardin to himself, "I am among my peers! And this is the proud world, Canardin, that has been beating you into rebellion! Pah, the lash only stings when it falls

from the hand of a superior! Every third man of them here is your like, except that he is able to keep a straight face!" And in this spirit he put on his haughtiest air and strode into the midst of the business, minded to make play and have it amuse him.

Which it did from the start. The Palais itself was a glitter of crystal lights and was everywhere gilded and gorgeous,—and nowhere shone more blatantly than in its contradictions. On the walls blazed the brains of the greatest of painters,—and the painted chairs threatened collapse at the weight of a child. The useless was one with the grand, so long as both served the worship of what was refined. As with the furnishings, so with the persons and what they said. It suited Canardin's mood to a nicety. Everything suited his mood, excepting one thing.

A certain mocking smile, which even yet he had seen only in fleeting and indistinct flashes, was yet to be found, though now for half an hour he had moved through the crowd in search of it. Here, seeing a minuet forming in the grand salon, he promptly cast about for a vis-à-vis, not so much for the dance as to pick up useful information. Especially as his own instincts taught him that the mocking smile, because it was

mocking, was probably playing a game with him.

On the instant that Canardin led into the dance the lady of his selection, he found the quality of his entertainment improving. Twice before then, he recalled, her train had been swept under his feet, as if trailed there deliberately. Her face, now that he caught it in full, under a chandelier, gave him a start for its likeness to a certain other. The likeness of a twin, at least, if not of an original.

"Madame la Marquise," said Canardin, as he danced, for he was never lacking in talk, "it is the sorrow of my life that I should be better acquainted with your portraits than I am with yourself!"

"Monsieur!" she answered, with the merriest light in her eyes. "And just when I thought you a stranger to Paris—on the evidence of your steps."

"I am a stranger to flattery, Madame—as you are a stranger to charity. As for my steps, any man is a stranger to the dance who is so perilously close to forty."

"Be of good cheer, Monsieur. Every day is taking you farther from forty," said the lady, so that Canardin gave a look at the saucy Tartar he

had caught. Whereupon she laughed gayly, to blunt the edge of her wit, and suddenly each, without the aid of a portrait, recognized a jolly rogue in the other, and both were well along in their postponed acquaintance.

"By the way, Monsieur," said the lady, "let me shorten your exertions in gallantry. I am not a Marquise, except twice weekly, and then only in play. It is all I can stand of it."

"I am sure any Marquise could endure to be you," said Canardin.

"Come," said she, "let us leave this nonsense. Especially as you do it so badly. That is proof alone that you must be somebody."

As soon as the dance was ended she led him away to the end of the long room. "Now that I have told you who I am," she said to Canardin, as he found chairs for them both, "perhaps you'll return the favor."

"And in the same manner," said Canardin. "I too am playing a part."

With the air of a queen the lady swept a lovely arm toward the room and said, "It is so very common! When I thought you some one out of the ordinary!"

"No. That is the sorrow of my life," said Canardin, "that I am ordinary."

"Then you have a vaulting ambition, Monsieur!"

"Yes," said Canardin, in the familiar dry tone, "it keeps me vaulting."

"'It,' or she?" the lady laughed.

"She? There is no she. Perhaps that is another of my sorrows. At times, Madame, I am bound to admit that there are other pleasures than toiling for France."

"Come, Monsieur," said she, "aren't you a bit of a humbug? Would it annoy you if I said I know who you are? And that I can guess why you are here?" Then she mocked him: "It is the sorrow of my life that I should be better acquainted with your report than I am with you."

For a moment Canardin studied in vain which name he should give to disabuse her, De Brisac or Lavallais. "It is good of you to mistake me for some one of importance," he said, to gain time.

"Come! Don't be stupid for once in your life," the lady said, and whispered in his ear, "Monsieur Canardin!"

With habitual iron mastery of himself, Canardin gave no sign of the violent inward start that took him. His gaze slowly turned upon the woman, to read her.

Had it come then, at last but so soon,—the false move, the one fatal step, that ultimate certainty which always threw a shadow over his lightest moments? His fate at last in the uncertain hands of a woman, the only foe entitled to his respect?

It suited the lady to hold Canardin in suspense for a time. Meanwhile he shot a lightning stare of scrutiny from one to another of the people about. And found them serenely occupied in the neatness of a bow, the effect of a ravishing glance. Not one of them troubled to turn and run him through.

Canardin concluded that he was not yet dead. "Madame," said he, "it is kind of you to mistake me for a person of such celebrity. But you drive me to a disclosure that I ought in decency to keep to myself. I too have devoted myself to adjusting a few of the inequalities in our perfect world. I am in Paris to present to the King's Council the interests of a great lady of my province—Madame de Longlen—who has suffered a cruel wrong at the hands of her husband. It is nothing to brag of, however."

"It is not," the sweet lady agreed. "I have heard of the case. It was talked of much—and settled last month. And the lady's name, by the

way, was De Kinglin—not wholly unknown in your province, Monsieur." And she laughed.

So did Canardin laugh, with mischief of his own. "Are there—two of you here—who know?" he asked resignedly.

"Your sum is correct for the present, Monsieur Canardin. But heaven knows how quickly the number will multiply, if you linger so much as an hour! Come, Monsieur!" the lady rallied him in confidential tones, and in a voice of such quality as gave Canardin to wonder if he truly need look much farther for the spice to life he was after. "We are not all like Monsieur Trevours. Do you hold all our wits as cheaply as his?" She tapped his arm with her fan of plumes, then spread it to shield the heartiest laugh at his expense. "That was droll, Monsieur; that was priceless! Julie will thank you for that!"

"I rather counted on Trevours's telling her," said Canardin sadly. "I made the matter so secret."

"It is as you say, Monsieur Canardin," the lady laughed on at him. "You have devoted your life to the service of others. There are several besides Julie Lecoigneux who will thank you for getting that great bear Trevours out

of the way! Monsieur de Braille, for instance."

Canardin obligingly let himself into her trap. "At times, Madame," he said, "I fear I am weak and selfish. But it was really to have Trevours out of De Braille's way that I sent him posting off to Versailles."

With that the lady disclosed that she was no great enemy to Canardin. "I wonder, Monsieur!" she exclaimed earnestly. "There are prizes withheld from even your audacity! Surely you yourself have no hope ——"

Canardin looked at her keenly, and for a moment baffled her as to his designs. "Madame," he said, "you flatter that audacity of mine. And there is something you forget. If I am the man you take me to be, I happen to be the one man in the world to enjoy the honor of Mademoiselle Julie's actual pursuit. What a blackguard I should be to disappoint her!"

"Julie Lecoigneux will not be disappointed, Monsieur! There's a dangerous wit in that young woman!"

"But at least you will grant me, Madame, a fight for my life?" Canardin laughed.

Not so the lady. "What, here, Monsieur!" she said in genuine alarm. "In not twenty min-

utes this company will know to a unit who you are! Not but that half of them would welcome your discovery as a priceless break to their boredom! Is it possible they do not know of you, speak of you? Well! A mysterious stranger is here, a striking figure. Will there not be suspicion, even hope, that it is you? It would be so like that Canardin! And do you fancy there is any cover for that bold bearing of yours? No, Monsieur. For once I must play the traitor—and that to my dearest friend—and get you away from here!"

"Madame," said Canardin in the greatest good nature, but drily, "were I Canardin, you would flatter me off to the gallows. Many thanks for your goodness, but it seems to me safer to stay on and earn your enmity, if your friendship costs so dear."

"Monsieur!" said the lady freezingly.

"I would add, by the way, that Mademoiselle Lecoigneux, and your description of her wit, are separated by the width of her tendency to talkativeness."

"Monsieur!" The lady now passed from freezing to heat. "I am hurt, and not for myself alone. Mademoiselle and myself are inseparable. Nothing is withheld between us. Perhaps I

should say that our one point of difference is Canardin—whether he should be hanged or be pensioned!"

"And you are for ——?"

"Monsieur, if you knew who I am, you would not ask such a question. Or question my friendship. You and I share a common contempt for this comedy." Her fan swept the room. "But I suppose everything is to be forgiven to one from the provinces. Paris knows me as —— Come!" she broke off abruptly. "I need the air. Take me out on the gallery."

All eyes followed the striking pair, as Canardin assisted Mademoiselle out of her chair and led her away on his arm. As it was still in early autumn, the tropical plants had not yet been removed from the open court within the Palais, and exotic odors rose from them, moistened by mist from the fountain in the center. Saunterers threaded the paths, more concerned, however, with the blooming youth on their arms than with the less gorgeous blooms on the plants about them. For a little while Canardin and his lady leaned over the beautifully wrought and scrolled iron railing to the gallery, and watched them. A few were already seated at tables, accepting partridge, ices and wines fetched by the

lackeys. One of these lackeys, after glancing up at the gallery, lifted a glass and set it down again, at the same moment that Canardin twirled his moustache.

"As you are in the best of health," Canardin remarked at last, "and have little other need of the breezes, I take it you also saw Morbihan approaching in there."

"And in his cups! Let me tell you, Monsieur Canardin, when that man, having failed in a certain quest, returns to the gaming tables, it will be seasonable for you to leave!"

"And disappoint Mademoiselle Julie? In case she is not you? Impossible!"

"As to that, Monsieur Canardin, Julie Lecoigneux has only to bide her time! And I give you my word, she is a very determined young woman. See here!" The lady straightened from her leaning posture and stood facing him. Under the glow from the lighted windows about the court, Canardin watched a face merry and piquant become pale and serious. "Leave fooling aside, Monsieur. Please see where you stand. One may carry a lark too far. And I have heard you set down as a gentleman. You are in the gravest possible danger yourself, and you menace others. Even if you have the least pos-

sible love for your own life, remember them. If you disclose yourself here, or let yourself be found, think of the scene that would follow! The uproar! The party itself might be broken up. The worse for you—as well as distressing to others. For all her mad pranks, Julie Lecoigneux has a position at Court, remember, and a dignity to be sustained."

"I see," said Canardin gravely. "By that you mean that I cannot allow myself to be taken at a time so inconvenient to Mademoiselle Lecoigneux!"

The lady burst forth into laughter again. "It could not have been put better, Monsieur Canardin! You have amply confirmed my estimate of your character."

"But what must be your estimate of my wits! My own reading of the situation is otherwise. It would scarcely be etiquette, you say, to take me here. Then I know of no safer place for me. Let us go in." He reached for her arm.

She came closer. "Leave fooling aside, I beg of you! Can you make the leap to the court below without hurt? At the window behind you stands the Duc de Morbihan, watching us!"

"Pah! He sees four of us, I'll wager. And what he wants is a tête-à-tête. Let him wait.

By the way, I could stand it, myself, to see at least two of you, Mademoiselle. Even though one would be saddened by the thought that it could be only an optical illusion. Certainly Nature has not fashioned two ——"

"Peace, man! Morbihan has left the window! He is coming out! There—in the doorway—behind the curtain—he stands!"

"Be attentive to me!" Canardin said, in a low voice. Louder, quite audibly, he opened, "I paid a visit to my friend and colleague Jean de Braille this morning. As no one else seems able to stop this Canardin, it seemed my imperative duty to take a hand in ending the scandal. Did De Braille, I wonder, convey anything to Mademoiselle Lecoigneux?"

"Only all that he knew! As usual!"

"Yes, but special and priceless information concerning ——?"

"You mean something said by a simpleton notary, a Monsieur—Monsieur ——"

"Armand de Lavallais?"

"That was the name. I believe he made the most absurd and outlandish pretensions ——"

"To catching Canardin,—precisely." Canardin looked over his shoulder now. "You see, he is gone. When a pretty woman is near, any

man is safe from Morbihan. One loveliest, wisest, wittiest woman in especial! I fancy, Mademoiselle, whatever the condition of his eyesight, he took you to be—*as I do*—Julie Lecoigneux."

"Monsieur!" She drew back with a little start. Then laughed lightly.

"I rather thought, Mademoiselle Lecoigneux," Canardin went on, "that you were arguing for your own comfort, when you wanted Canardin out of the way—even over the railing, if need be. But I happen to be only Armand de Lavallais."

"Monsieur," the young lady said, recovering a little. "I thought we had disposed of that little jest."

"My pretensions, it is true, Mademoiselle, may be absurd and outlandish. But so long as they give me a community of interest with you ——"

"Monsieur! Recall yourself!"

"I am speaking of a professional interest, Mademoiselle. Perhaps it would seem less outlandish if I showed you"—Canardin made motion of reaching into an inner pocket—"a *lettre de cachet* made out in my name, and handed to me only this evening."

Again Mademoiselle drew back with an exclamation. But whether the exclamation was for

Lavallais's importance or Canardin's audacity, Canardin was unable to tell.

"It came to me through De Braille's influence," he continued, watching her narrowly. "What a wonderful fellow that De Braille is! I am sure you have observed it."

Having done Lavallais one good turn in the morning, Canardin was perfectly ready to end the day with another good lick in favor of De Braille. But Mademoiselle was not the complaisant De Braille. All excitement now, and watching him closely, she said, "Let us go in!" and caught at his arm.

"Mademoiselle has no further need of air?"

"Of information, rather!" she laughed nervously. When they had got back among the throng, where the numbers were dense enough to screen the tumult of doubt and uncertainty he had stirred in her mind, she said, on a sudden thought, "Now, tell me about Cécile. Cécile first! De Braille will keep. Pour it out to the very uttermost. How is the dear girl? What have you to say of her?"

Canardin paid that young woman, whoever she was, the tribute of one swift, wry gaze. Then he covered his amusement, his embarrassment, and his mute admiration of her wit in a long, low

bow. In the short course of that bow he had time to think to himself, "Curse you, Canardin, for never having made the acquaintance of that fiancée of yours!" Aloud, and even while thinking of that, he said, "Mademoiselle, it is impossible to praise one lovely lady—in the presence of another." He then wished the house might catch fire, or something. In Mademoiselle's eyes was a light more than a trifle too bright for him. Canardin seized the readiest moment to take his leave. To Canardin the temperature of the place appeared to be rising. Himself in need of a little air, he stepped out on the gallery again, a quieter place for observation.

"So that is Julie Lecoigneux!" he sighed. And would have sighed more, but that he now caught sight of something else to pique his curiosity. In the salon, near the window, De Braille was standing in company with the Duc de Morbihan. The Duc was pointing, somewhat unsteadily, to the door to the gallery; both were talking excitedly.

Canardin lingered only long enough in the gallery to await the appearance of a particular lackey. "Curse the laggard fool, where is he?" Canardin growled. But in a moment the fellow appeared, and after some difficulty Canardin

managed an exchange of the same sign. "I'll slit that idiot lackey's throat if he's drunk again," the master snapped, and then hastened within.

CHAPTER VIII

VEXED by the slight inharmony between himself and the lackey, Canardin turned impatiently back to the crowded room for a word with De Braille. A man of Canardin's temper may toy with subtlety on occasion; when anything awkward impends, he boldly demands to know what it is. Thus boldly headed toward De Braille, even though Morbihan himself were by, Canardin entered the great hall again in time to witness the close of an apparent "scene", which he instantly saw had to do with himself. The occupants of the entire room had stopped whatever had been their exercise of the moment before and stood rooted, astonishment on every face, and every face turned toward Canardin. Evidently something of a sensational nature had been said concerning himself. The temperature of the room was rising higher for Canardin! De Braille and the Duc de Morbihan were not to be seen, but in a moment the meaning of this impromptu tableau was plain. From the depths of

the crowd, transfixed in silence, came sounds of a scuffle, and then De Braille's voice.

"Morbihan! Achille! I beg of you! It can't be he! Come away. Take the air and recover. You are mad. There are things which even the Duc de Morbihan may not say. Not here."

"I t-tell you I kn-*know!*" came Morbihan's thick and guttural reply. "It's he! D-do you shuppose I c-can't shee with m'own eyes? I'll report this th-thing to the K-King himself!"

"Think where you are, Morbihan! Another time, another place."

"Wh-what! And let that d-dog escape!"

"Think where you are, man! This will outrage our host! Your suspicions are silly! Base!"

"B-base? He's here, my li'l pink Jean! Base? Th-that calls for an accounting. T-tomorrow at three, at F-Fontainebleau! You h-hear me? An' if I get n-near that fellow tonight, I'll—I'll run him through! Or I'm a d-dog myself!"

A door closed upon the altercation. Gradually the tableau dissolved. By some one's quick order the viols struck up again. A few, the younger of the party, renewed their dancing. Others fell into furtive chatter. But however

rigid attitudes unbent, an ominous stiffness remained. Such things are not forgotten. They spread like a vapor. Whether Canardin's name had been actually mentioned, he was unable to guess. He finally decided that it had. For though he turned on his heel with entire unconcern, he everywhere encountered an air of constraint. Men stared at him; the women deftly drew away. Whoever he was, it was sufficient that he was a figure disapproved by the Duc de Morbihan.

Any newcomer, with the cleanest of hands, who enters a brilliant company totally unknown, will have his embarrassments. Canardin, rubbing elbows with any number of those who, at the instant of recognition, would pounce or shout an alarm, was hardly so happy as he sometimes was at two in the morning, correcting those evils which usurers inflict upon a helpless society! He glanced toward the chair where he had left the disappointing Julie Lecoigneux, the object of his visit, the excuse for his intrusion. She was gone. Even she had deserted him.

Coolly, with his head high, and the air of a man burdened with matters that take one far out of all this frivolity, Canardin moved out on the gallery again. For some minutes he waited in

vain, and then, for a second, reeled at a shock. Not one lackey but two finally appeared among the crowd in the court, looked up at him, and exchanged with him the identical sign. Something had gone wrong.

Almost, and in precisely one hour, Julie's warning had come true. Back in the brilliantly peopled room he was noticed only to be avoided. The train of many a robe of scarlet, lavender, rose or gold he saw, but rarely its jeweled corsage! The men felt for their blades or their pockets as he passed. At such a time a Canardin does something.

Stalking by the row of chairs at the border of the room, each turning upon him a pair of curious eyes, he presently descried Monsieur Molière, for that moment sitting alone, waiting to go on in his comedy, but weary already and looking ill and old. By the turn of fortune a chair was vacant beside him. It was Canardin's chance, a chance to reëstablish himself.

"Monsieur," he said, languidly sinking into the empty chair at the great man's side, "it would be unpardonable of me to address you were I not convinced that on one point at least we meet as equals."

"That is quite possible," drawled Monsieur

Molière, at once amused. "Who is it I have the honor to address?"

"A man as sad as yourself, Monsieur," said Canardin, never lacking for things to say. "Monsieur, in company with thousands of others in Europe, I am a devoted lover of your works. But I say to my friends, 'Wait! Monsieur Molière's masterpiece is yet to come. That we shall have when at last Molière consents to tell us—*what he knows.*'"

"What, Monsieur! My candor has earned me cabbages enough already!"

"Monsieur Molière, do you suppose I am the only one who hears, between your merry lines, the cry of a heart that is breaking for his fellows?"

"You are certainly original, Monsieur, in your compliments!"

"I have been watching you this evening, Monsieur—wondering to myself, 'What does Molière think of this scene!' What must any Frenchman think of it?"

Monsieur Molière's reply was a silent thought to himself, "This gentleman is cracked."

Canardin rolled on undismayed. "A sweet lady said in my hearing this evening, 'Ah, this—this is France!' Whereas, you and I know bet-

ter. Monsieur"—Canardin now turned more fully, more confidentially to the great man—"it is an astute monarch who puts his historians on the fattest of pensions."

"He is drunk," thought Molière. "I wish I could carry my wine as well!"

"Such historians," Canardin braved the mocking smile directed upon him, "become your strongest rivals! This age, they are saying already, is the greatest, the most brilliant of all. At once, Monsieur, such history outdoes your works in comedy!"

The narrowing glance in Molière's eyes was saying, "There is wit in his madness!"

"I am a stranger to these places," Canardin was saying, quite truly, and added even more truly, "They would prefer to have me a stranger. One warms his hands here, I find, but not his heart. Are you really at home here yourself, Monsieur, where no one says what he believes, and no one believes him?"

The great reader of men sat listening with gathering interest, with a guess of his own at the heart that was speaking between these mad lines.

"Who cares what is said, so long only as it is said with elegance?" Canardin continued, so that, while he spoke in a low voice, others about

strained to catch what it was that so plainly drafted the interest of Molière. "How can one keep a straight face here when genius, like Racine, listens with the utmost gravity to the jackanapes! Merit, like that of De Braille, meets its mimics with the greatest respect. Those who have risen by effort and those by assassination are here together, and even the pious overlook the difference between them. I have seen the sage and the silly flirting under the balconies, the beautiful dancing with the beastly. Meanwhile French peasants are dying to the music of Lully. Monsieur, I am a jolly rogue myself. Here I am among my own kind."

"Monsieur," said Molière, "if you keep on, I shall have to quote you!"

"Monsieur," said Canardin, "if I keep on, you will never dare to quote me! This is not France, Monsieur. Let us be thankful for that. France lies there." Canardin made a fairly general sweep with his arm.

The gesture attracted further attention. Dancers whose eye had been caught forgot their steps for a second. Others still stared, but now in a different manner.

"Monsieur," Canardin was encouraged by all this, "I see in your eye that you think this

strange talk. One keeps such emotions to himself, if he can. At least here. This is beautiful, it is grand. Such lovely women, almost they are worth what they cost. But I happen to have come, Monsieur, from that France where the bills are paid. There you will drive along the roads and mark strange humps in the fields, rummaging the soil with ferocious energy. Suddenly they stand up, scorched almost black by the sun. And what you thought were animals turn out to be men and women. Speak to them and they answer you—in French. It is a fact, they are human! At night they slink off into caves, and there eat black bread and roots, and drink water. Water, Monsieur! They save other Frenchmen the terrible drudgery of sowing and tilling and reaping for their own livelihood. And we oblige them to beg for the bread they have earned by such toil! Here, Monsieur, the historian writes at his ease. Out there"—again the gesture—"the tenth part of all France is begging. Here, Monsieur, reach success by the blackest route you please, and the historian hastens to set down your name. The others, out there, he forgets." Canardin paused.

"Go on," said Molière, with a bright light in his eyes. A scarlet-liveried lackey, who had over-

heard, drew nearer to Monsieur Molière's side and was listening also with heightened interest.

"No, Monsieur," Canardin said, with great emotion, "I cannot go on. It is too much for me. This elegance, this last refinement of mind and taste, flourishes on the wealth and authority of a great king. What will happen when a weak one follows? Then, Monsieur, I see a vision. Through this solid floor, among these frightened dancers, I see a great fist daring to rise, gnarled by toil. Monsieur!" Canardin broke off, laughing. "I have said too much! After all, under my serious exterior there is a vein of gayety, which one of these days will get me into mischief!"

"I shall be glad to speak a word for you!" laughed Molière.

"I may yet ask that favor!" laughed Canardin. "Monsieur, I can honestly say I'd be glad to die like a French peasant. But perhaps I have lived too much among them. Such loveliness here, such wit—France may well be proud of it. That lovely young thing over there, Monsieur"—Canardin inclined his head toward a familiar face which had appeared—"that, I believe, is the celebrated Mademoiselle Julie Lecoigneux?"

"Bless you, no!" Molière laughed so heartily that even the near-by lackey forgot his discipline and likewise laughed. "Have you also encountered that lady's tongue, Monsieur?" Molière asked, with amusement. "There is only one like it in France. The most bewitching little Tartar of her time! That is the dashing comedienne, Sophie Arnould."

"Oh," said Canardin. "She thought I was forty!" And of what other absurdities he might have been delivered will never be known, for events burst upon him, suddenly, with the simultaneousness of a sheaf of rockets. No sooner had he left the welcome protection of Monsieur Molière when the fireworks started.

Nevertheless, Canardin's purpose had been fulfilled. As he strode sadly away, he saw himself reëstablished in the graces of those from whose stare respect had banished hostility.

"Who is that man?" Monsieur Molière exclaimed as Canardin passed from hearing.

It happened that he asked this question of De Braille, who now rushed up with a question of his own. "They told me, Monsieur, I should find him here!"

"That man? But who is he, De Braille?"

"A friend of mine. Armand de Lavallais. A

provincial notary of note. Something of an eccentric, no doubt. Where is he, please?"

"He left, all too soon! Find him again!"

"That I will! Great news for him! For us all, Monsieur! A lackey has just brought report —this one here, as I live! probably waiting to tell you also—that the famous Canardin has been captured!"

"What, Monsieur!" Countless persons crowded near.

"It is true! At last! The ladies in particular will be delighted!" De Braille turned to them. "Their milliner, Perdrigeon, has robbed them often enough. Well, now he has been robbed himself! Though he'll probably get it all back from the bottom of the Seine. Canardin was taken while rifling his shop! Where is Armand?"

Followed and aided by an excited group, he soon caught up with our sad companion. "Armand!" De Braille caught the shoulder of the astonished man and whisked him round. "Do you hear it? My poor fellow! Your life's labor is all in vain! Canardin is captured! I've told them to bring him here, and put him on display! MONSIEUR himself, when he comes, will be disported! That dukedom for you, nevertheless,

my Armand!" De Braille laughed. "I'm sure your labors have brought this about!"

"Armand?" a lady near by exclaimed. "I thought he was the Comte de Brisac!"

"Ah!" De Braille turned, having overheard. "That is only another of his heavy disguises! Now, poor fellow, he may leave them off. Bid them good-by. As for Julie! My poor Julie! She's probably in one of her own. All evening I've hunted her. God knows where she is! Probably laughing her head off at me, from under the gray hairs of some old dowager, watching for Canardin—here! 'Twill break her poor heart when she hears the news!" And De Braille was off on his fruitless quest of her.

"I ought to be with you to sympathize!" cried Canardin, following.

They had forged through the crowd not above twenty steps when another loud voice halted them. "Canardin has been taken! They've got the man Canardin! A lackey has just brought the news. So like the rogue! He was caught in the Bureau of Trevours himself!" this shouter gleefully published his news.

This actual shout, which came from the far end of the room, sent a wave of delighted exclamations and laughter down the length of it. Now

the whole company knew of the capture. At once De Braille and his follower set off in that direction. "He has got it wrong," laughed De Braille. "But no matter. Let's see what he knows."

In not ten steps they were halted again, by a shout, this time, from the opposite end of the room. "Aye, Canardin is taken! But you've had it all awry. I have just come with the news from the crowd in the Place du Louvre. They are mad with excitement. A lackey heard the uproar, and went to see. They took Canardin in the ancient Roman Amphitheatre near the Sorbonne. The rascal had actually gone there to join a company of guards sent by Trevours *to capture Canardin* at Issy!"

This fetched an immense outburst of laughter from the entire gathering. A crackle of comment arose on every side. "Ah, that Canardin!" "He was born to amuse us!" "What a pity this is the end of him!"—and such remarks. To all this Canardin himself contributed something that renewed the laughter. Lifting himself on tiptoe, he shouted back to the voice at the end of the room,

"Are you sure they have got *all* of that Canardin?"

"Really," said De Braille, sobering now. "There do seem to be too many of these happy successes! I wonder if some one is not hoaxing us!"

"I am reasonably sure," said Canardin, drily now, "that some one is!"

"S-some one (hic) i-is," came the echo, from a speaker whose identity was unmistakable, as the onlookers, now suddenly silent, parted before the uncertain approach of the Duc de Morbihan. His *perruque* was at odds with his head. His jaw protruded, and his bristling moustache was lifted in a harsh smile that disclosed both layers of teeth. In his eye was the cold glint of a man angered on wine to the point of rage. By one arm he dragged a terrified lackey, and by the other he led the immensely mortified but true and genuine Armand Lavallais. Straight before De Braille and Canardin he brought them, while the roomful of people, unable to remember decorum before such a new interest, dropped other pursuits and edged round about, a circular audience.

With that canine smile, the Duc, his burly figure lurching now against Lavallais and now against the lackey, said to Canardin, "M-Monsieur, I sh'pose you'll permit a word with you?"

"Certainly, if you are able to utter one," said Canardin.

"D-do you re-rec'nizhe this man?" he shook Lavallais's arm, with a drunken air of having got everything over except the hanging.

Poor Lavallais, already blushing crimson as the center of so much public curiosity, heartily wished he might die, if that were the only escape from the admiring smile with which Canardin glanced up and down the new finery the aspiring young notary had bought from those thousand pistoles!

"You kn-know thish man, m' dear feller?" the Duc was snarling. "No m-matter! I'll shee to both you in good t-time. You, too, m' dear li'l pink J-Jean! Al-l-low me to int'duce you to your old f-friend, Arm-mand Lavallais! H-a-a, ha, ha!" he ran off into laughter. "S-sure there's a hoax here t-to-night. There's th' cream o' the j-joke!" He pointed to Canardin. "Jean, I ought t' h-hang you inshtead. And give Canardin y-your place at C-Court!" The Duc glanced over the stupefied crowd, to call a closer attention to this prodigious pleasantry he had uncovered. Being a peer of France, he felt privileged to take his time and make the most of it. "As for you," he turned back to Canardin, "I'll

d-do for you in a m-minute. W-wait till y' hear me with 'im!" he called to the crowd.

Canardin, however, had ceased to heed the peer of France. His eyes were riveted instead on the poor, offending lackey, who seemed ready to faint from mortification and terror.

The Duc himself now turned to the lackey, whose fright he increased with a roar. "As for this l-low-born lout!" He shook the lackey's arm till the fellow cried out with the pain. "He all but sp-spoiled with his idiocy my *coup* of a l-lifetime. I've a mind to *w-wring your neck.*" He growled it out, like some angered animal. "*He's* the monkey that started the news," the Duc said to the crowd, and turned back again, with another violent shake. "You will try your merry wit on your betters, w-will ye! 'N' almost lose me my prize! I'll teach ye your duties, ye lout, ye gutter-born jackanapes, ye ——"

The Duc's apostrophe, even to a humble lackey, descended to terms that soon turned the ladies away,—until Canardin's singular defence of the poor fellow turned them back to see again, with a shrill cry.

With movements of his arms almost too rapid to see, Canardin had the Duc reeling free of both Lavallais and the lackey. Two more swift

touches, and before all eyes the lackey's scarlet cocked hat was rolling on the floor, and beside it what had been but a moment before a luxurious little moustache and beard on the lackey's face. Instantly a circle of raven ringlets cascaded down, and after one lightning glance of consternation, the now crimson face of Julie Lecoigneux buried itself against the laces at Canardin's throat.

"I thought," said Canardin, "that I recognized Monsieur Molière's devoted attendant."

"*Julie!*" De Braille stepped forward and stopped, helpless to decide whether to take Julie away, or first run Morbihan through.

"*You!*" De Morbihan cried at her, with more point and less elegance. Meanwhile he straightened himself, as became the occasion. "So this is the way you ——"

"Morbihan!" came De Braille's warning. The young man was white and his hand reached at his side. He caught himself quickly, however, with a sense of where they were. "To-morrow, Morbihan," he choked out, hardly able to control his words. "Remember your promise! At Fontainebleau!"

"One moment, gentlemen," said Canardin, in the old dry tone. "You will spare this, I am

sure." He reached out and plucked from Lavallais's shoulders the cloak which he had not yet had time to leave off, and with it shrouded from neck to toe the figure of Julie Lecoigneux, shrinking in the tight and scarlet breeches of a lackey.

Of all the countless witnesses to this moment of drama, Morbihan was the first to recover himself. Even something of sobriety he likewise recovered. "But that is Canardin!" he shouted, and made a lunge. "Julie knows!"

All eyes were meeting Canardin's. "Well," he said coolly, "it would not strain me unduly to think of worse company for Mademoiselle Julie."

"Ra-a-a!" was as close as Morbihan could come to words for his feelings. "Take him!" And he would have obeyed his own command, but that De Braille stepped before.

"Julie," he said, to the back of her curly head, "is that man Canardin?"

"She knows!" roared Morbihan.

"If I were certain," said Canardin, "that Monsieur le Duc is able to read, I might show him a certain letter I received from the hand of His Majesty this morning."

"A fraud! Out of the way, Jean!"

"Julie!" cried De Braille, throwing his weight

against the onrush of the Duc. "Tell us! Is that man Canardin?"

To raise her face, at that moment, in that company, perhaps cost Julie Lecoigneux a greater effort than the writing of all Molière's comedies cost that man of genius. She kept it straight, however. Earnest, even. One glance she and that man exchanged. And perhaps all that Monsieur Molière has ever written was in it. Only one of the things that Canardin's eyes said in that second was:

"What! So long as my capture is inevitable in the end,—at Issy, shall we say?—why let them spoil it for you here?"

Hers said: "Trust me!"

Why it was, after that, that Mademoiselle Julie impetuously put herself at a considerable distance from Canardin, only she or any other woman knows. Perhaps because there was something else in Canardin's glance.

From that distance of a step or two, as she heard Morbihan demand again, "Is that Canardin?" Mademoiselle Julie studied him, still with a straight face. She even cocked her head on one side, to make the study more painstaking. Then she said:

"No, that is not Monsieur Canardin."

Nor is it to be known precisely what, beyond an impish spirit of mischief in her, made her whisk about upon poor Armand Lavallais, and say in terrible tones:

"But I'm not so sure of that man!"

"*He!*" Morbihan turned. They all turned upon Armand. "Come, Monsieur!" the Duc thundered. "Are you the impostor?"

Said Julie Lecoigneux demurely:

"I distinctly heard a dangerously beautiful young woman here use the word Canardin to him this evening."

"Monsieur!" said the Duc to Lavallais.

"Monsieur!" echoed De Braille.

When they turned back to Canardin, to compare the two for purposes of discovering which was the unbidden guest, Canardin was gone. And to make sure of one Canardin at least, they hustled poor Lavallais away.

CHAPTER IX

AT eleven o'clock that night Canardin, now in the leathern suit he affected for his hardier exploits on the road or in the country, repaired by arrangement to the floor of the ruined Roman Amphitheatre at the foot of the hill near the Sorbonne. There, in the flesh, and gathered near the solitary oil lantern lighting the place, were the forty brave men chosen by Trevours to proceed with Canardin toward his capture at Issy.

Warned to expect a commander of eccentric appearance and manner, they saluted Canardin without question, and with a curiosity that he did his best to conceal he passed among them on inspection. Young fellows they were, in the main, thick and heavy set. Trevours had picked with a generous hand. Every mother's son of them had a face to thrust out that gathered something of ferocity from the very darkness itself.

"H'm!" was Canardin's professional opinion, as he passed down the line. "I shouldn't mind adding such tough ones to my own numbers! As fine a gang of cutthroats as ever I've seen! As

fine a set of captors as an honest man could want! Beauties, every one of them! But ——"

In a word, not a thing was lacking to Canardin's satisfaction except the only one that mattered. Look as he would, not a whisker was there that had a loose look. To try their voices, then, he made them call off their names. Every man jack of them bawled his out like a croak from a bassoon. At any other time Canardin would have said with gusto, "The finest French voices outside of a bull's hide!" Under present circumstances he thought a frog's was sweeter.

She was not there!

Perhaps, after the uproar at the Palais, it has been too much to expect.

To end all possible foolery, Canardin asked point-blank. "I was informed by Monsieur Trevours that a young man named Lecoigneux, anxious to be present and assist at the taking of Canardin, would join this party under my personal protection. Is that man here?"

No one answered at once, until a spokesman felt something incumbent on him. "No such person appeared, Monsieur," he growled in tones like the creak of a gallows stair.

"H'm!" came Canardin's sniff. "His valor died in the cradle!"

There was nothing for it but to lead this precious collection to the nearest woods, lose them thoroughly, and leave them to wander back to Paris as it suited them.

"Forward, gentle angels!" Canardin gave the command and sent them ahead, with their throats full of laughter and nothing in their heads. Otherwise they might have questioned a commander who chose to see their backs instead of showing them his. So to Issy they started, with forty light hearts, and one that was heavy.

Truly her interest had been short-lived. Canardin's vanity was sorely hurt. Going out into the vasty darkness, thus, all uncaptured, he felt hideously lonely. After those wild ruses with De Braille, with Lavallais and Trevours, not to mention the little excitement at the Palais Royal, there would now be not a single hospitable cranny left him in Paris. And for the amusement of at least one last word he had hoped of the fairest and most determined of his takers, before quitting the city. To be suffered to depart like this, forsooth, neglected, ignored, dropped out of mind! In return for that, he would see that he was missed. Paris should remember his stay, short as it was. While he was about it, by way of souvenir, he decided to convert these forty good

men to his own uses, if he could find a way to do it.

Already Canardin was planning one, as he piloted his crew along the road by the Seine in the blackness of a cloudy night, his spirits sinking, his petulance mounting at every step. The going was rough and the way was long. Finally, after several miles, it occurred to Canardin to be rid of his bad humor by unloading it on these luckless beggars.

"Halt!" he called, and kept them standing in the road, whilst he sat down to rest on a stone.

"What is it, Monsieur?" one of them asked at last.

"I thought I heard an owl," said Canardin.

"That has been known to happen before, Monsieur."

"Silence, fool! It is the favorite signal among Canardin's band!"

"Our valor has not died in the cradle, Monsieur," a young man laughed.

"Then your prudence did! Consider! We are still fourteen miles from Issy. Yet his men are posted that far out. It means three hundred of them at the least. I am your commander, men, not your murderer. Any of you wish to return?"

"Let us listen," a low voice suggested.

The owl just then obliged with a hoot, but from another tree.

"There's the answer," said Canardin. "They are aware and watching. I know their tricks! Nasty work, taking their crafty shots! One never sees whence the bullet comes. And their aim makes widows and orphans. We'd best separate. No! That opens the way to a massed attack!"

"We'll need all our own mass to meet it, Monsieur," growled another.

"Even more so, as we go forward," said Canardin.

"Had we best wait for reinforcements? Seeing we're but forty?"

"Wait? And let the prize slip!" snapped Canardin. "You know the reward. I've heard it said there's a dukedom awaiting his captor. That's what the King himself thinks of that Canardin. Yet the brains of the fox in the might of the lion alone will take that man!"

"If Monsieur fits the description, let him go on alone!" Canardin overheard one say to another.

"And leave his estate behind him! I'd be any notary's orphan, if any one asked me!" that other answered.

"My men," said Canardin, "it is time we shaped our plans. But first let me tell you. I am willing to take Canardin. After that he belongs to you for the hanging. Many men I have sent, and many more will I send, to the gallows. But never that man. A plague on his head, yet I never knew him to rob an honest man. Always it is thieves a thousandfold worse than himself. Money lenders!—those sharks that have perhaps every one of you honest Frenchmen in their grip, snatching the very chair and kettle from under your thatch, the clothes from your back, the crust from your lips,—all to the detriment of your dignity—they are Canardin's delight! 'Tis a pity he must be hanged so soon. Otherwise he might rid France of those pests."

"I could point him to one!" a feeling voice said.

"And what does Canardin do with his takings? Hands them back to the poor that have been pinched by those sharks till they cried to die! Man of law that I am, I must say there are certain laws that are well broken. There is the devilish cleverness of that Canardin. Never once has he broken a good law, nor left a bad one unrebuked. Let it hit whom it will. This summer, for example, what does Canardin do with a

marquis, no less! It is the will of God that we must have these nobles to ride us down on the highways and cost us taxes at home. Nevertheless, there are some of them that overstep even the will of God in such matters. What does this marquis do but seize Jean Balmaque's prize heifer, the pride of Jean's life, the sole support of Jean's family, and slit open its body, does this marquis, for a warm place for his feet, to cure his gout. Such is the open report of that matter. The truth is too black for the telling. You know for yourselves how these marquises do for you. If only they confined their attentions to your heifers! With excellent reason does this Canardin hunt up that marquis, and burn down his place, and haunt the poor devil night and day, till he cheerfully paid poor Jean Balmaque for his heifer. It was but one of the many sins done in our poor world that your Canardin, sinner himself, has rebuked."

"H'm!" came thoughtfully out of the night. "He might have done worse, might Canardin! Pity there is only one of him!"

"Aye, but he has hundreds to help him—thousands even. And more lucky beggars joining his banner by the month! A hard time he has, to keep them away, with the merry times he pro-

vides for them, and the fat of the land for their wage! There is the frightful strength of the man—that he is so loved by his followers, for the kindness and bounty they have at his hands. What wonder the King is at his wits' end to catch that Canardin, with men like yourselves on beggarly pay—when you're paid at all—and fed poorer than pigs in the sty!"

"'Tis true!" several said to each other.

"What time o' night might it be, Monsieur, if you please?"

"High time we be going on," said Canardin, still comfortably seated on his stone. "But one moment. You have reminded me. I must warn you. Perhaps, after all, the married among you had better retire. I have known men to set out after Canardin and never afterward be seen again among their fellows. 'Tis a fearful thing, to vanish so and leave not a trace for a widow to sigh over! So terrible is that Canardin's strength, so silently is it spread out, like a secret order, that no man knows when his sins will take him into the net! This is the very night for it! Aye, it is well that we hang him soon, or his power may be such that not even in the name of the King may so slender a band as we honest men set forth after that man and hope to return alive!

So I say, the married among you had better turn themselves homeward, to those who need the little bread they earn. It will do for the young and unmarried, who have so little to leave behind, to follow on with me."

"But if we divide the force, Monsieur," a young man said, "it means fewer than ever against Canardin's many, whichever few he attacks."

"Or both," said Canardin, pricking up a new interest at this new voice. "In that case, your one hope of safety will lie in taking instant oath to Canardin! Unless you like fading away in your tracks!"

"By heavens!" said a deep bass, "take my head off if you will, Monsieur, but I would not take it amiss if some one told me where that kind Canardin is to be found! I have a sudden fancy for that Canardin! and none for shivery work like this, with these owls about!"

"From no further away than behind yon hill, Canardin, no doubt, has overheard what you say, my man. And will make you as safe as a church, among Frenchmen who are becoming rich by befriending the poor. By righting behind the law the wrongs that are done in front of it! 'Tis a strange thing, the law, as who should know bet-

ter than I! And to think that I should so soon be having that friend of the poor, that Canardin, hanged on the gibbet!"

A chorus of whispers came out of the pause. "Let him do his own catching and hanging! As for me, I'm married!"

"But we single men can't be left here alone to our fate!"

Then the louder voice of that younger man, with the touch of a taunt in its tone:

"Monsieur is giving Monsieur Canardin warning enough of that hanging to come, with all these owls about to listen! There flies one now!"

"There speaks a bold spirit!" their commander piped, and stood up so suddenly as to startle his band. "I'll warrant that young man and I alone are enough!"

"I'll pick no quarrel with that!" was whispered—and answered:

"The man is cracked! We had better flee!"

"Stay, men! I give you my word. If it comes to the worst, I will surrender you all, myself included, to Canardin, rather than see us all hanged to the trees like dogs. Aye, he may well be bold," the commander said, "who has not yet seen a hanging! No sight for babes and suck-

lings, indeed! Hangmen themselves have sickened at their work, as I have seen with my own eyes. Aye, 'twould surprise me little if the ghost of old Jacques Chabert himself would scream from that wood in a minute, as I tell of his hanging for the theft of a pheasant last March. True it is, the pheasant belonged to one of the six châteaux of his excellency the Duc de Morbihan, whilst Jacques was only a peasant, and right well hanged for his crime. My faith, the row he made about it, crying to heaven for his life, that peasant, after the fright he had given that bird! Not even the King's mandate, mind you, was enough to convince that stupid Jacques, a man like yourselves, that he had honestly come by his hanging! It came at the end of a night precisely like this—dark, silent, when the very leaves whisper bloody secrets, and anything may happen. Next morning at dawn, when they haul that worthless Jacques from his cell into the sunlight, not even then is he able to believe what they mean to do for him! Not though there in the crowd about the gallows is his wife herself looking up at him! When her face is so white and her eyes so big that a fool could have seen the sight of his own death in them. Up the steps they walk that Jacques, and read him the ter-

rible account of his crime. And all Jacques does is look stupidly about and down at his wife, as if he couldn't believe a word of it. Aye, but he believed it the next minute. This next second, men, you may hear his spirit repeat in that very wood the sound he made when he cast up his eyes and saw the pretty golden scarf they were letting down about his neck! He just looked up, and went this way:

"'*A-a-i-i-e-e!*' Like that!"

Canardin cupped his hands and shouted this at the top of his lungs, so that the woods rang with it, and long, avenging echoes hurried to join them from far across the Seine.

"That hangman went mad and died in a horrible fit, as you may well believe; and here in these very woods, at night, his soul goes fleeing before the screams of that poor Jacques, so that priests themselves shiver in their beds when they hear it!"

These last of Canardin's words were addressed, along with Canardin's deep and mellow laughter, to the backs of thirty-nine other lusty hangmen who suddenly had no stomach for their job. Pell-mell they pattered down the road on the way to safety and to Paris. One lone young man of the forty remained, laughing with him. And even

that one's laughter died a swift death as Canardin turned and said quietly:

"Ah, I thought I counted only thirty-nine names to forty persons."

CHAPTER X

BETWEEN them there was a very brief silence, which Canardin was the first to break. "I believe, Mademoiselle Lecoigneux," he said, "that we have an appointment at Meaux to-morrow—Saturday."

She answered nothing, out of her many emotions at the moment. It says something, nevertheless, that one of Mademoiselle's emotions was that of embarrassment at appearing in such fantastic habiliments before this particular man. Canardin laughed gently, as he noticed, even in the heavy darkness, her doubtful glances toward her boots and breeches.

"Truly, Mademoiselle," Canardin decided to help her out, "I scarcely know how to forgive myself. Those brave gentlemen seem to have left us in something of a dilemma. Perhaps you have noticed."

The lone remaining soldier of the King continued to enact the young man for just one minute longer. She placed her hands in the gaping pockets of her coat and surveyed this man, or as much of him as she could make out in the

darkness, moved both to be furious and to smooth him down in some disarming manner. So she let fly a bit of a laugh, of the very tiniest dimensions. It would do just as well to see how he meant to behave. And when he kept her waiting, with laughter of his own, the instincts of her sex of course taught her to fly to woman's first precaution in any emergency. She stamped her foot and was haughty.

"Monsieur! I believe you contrived this!"

"No, Mademoiselle," said Canardin modestly. "You do me too much credit. It's nothing but sheer good fortune."

In spite of herself Mademoiselle laughed again at that. Matters were becoming perilously good-natured, and she was obliged to check herself.

"Monsieur! I would have you understand this is serious!"

"I suppose it is," said Canardin, as if he were crushed. "I do so badly. How long it has taken to come within reach of my capture! And now that it is here at last—behold! It is dark. It is late. You are totally without escort. We are on the edge of a wilderness. It is inconvenient to Paris. Ah, Mademoiselle, don't say, if you please, that this is any of my contrivance!"

Once again Mademoiselle crushed down a

gurgle of laughter with only the stoutest effort. Fortunately he gave her something to resent. To remind a lady at such a time of all the conventions she had broken so badly! Even so, Julie fell into the very vein of this dominant figure when she said:

"Next time, Monsieur, you will please to manage better."

"Be sure I'll improve, Mademoiselle!" said Canardin. "And yet I can't survive many of these disappointments. To have come so close to being captured and have you decline it—after what it has cost you! Bonbouche, it seems, has loved your money better than mine. And you have paid him for nothing. He knows only my past, and it's what I have in my head for the future that alone has value for you. Would you accept, also, another bit of advice? When next you leave a memorandum in my pocket, be careful to erase from the other side of the paper the name and the tender sentiments of Monsieur de Braille. He might be annoyed."

"Monsieur!" Julie tried still to be severe. It is true that the night hid her blushes, but not all her self-control could rule out traces of amusement in her tones. "Will you please give over trifling! We have a situation on our hands!"

Trifling! To this prankish and mischievous girl the distance and the darkness were no more than an impropriety. To Canardin it was a daylight peopled with matters that he was seeing only too clearly. Alone, he would have taken such hazards as wearisome matters of course. This delightful impediment could not be got too quickly out of them!

Julie Lecoigneux missed in Paris! After that stormy moment at the Palais! Her whereabouts and her madcap errand now certainly guessed, even by wits like those of Morbihan! Within the hour, Canardin knew, the road, the woods, the river would ring with the calls of her searchers. He gazed at that point in the darkness whence came the sound and the scent of her, and imagined what a moment it would be when he handed her back to them. Gave her up. Now that there was a something—shall we call it a novelty?—in hearing that voice—in having such a forbidden thing so near ——

Canardin inwardly showered himself with curses and commiseration! Then he laughed. There was something he had forgotten. After all she was Julie Lecoigneux. Her own easy recollection of that fact further amused him.

"Monsieur!" he heard. It was her demand

for assurance. His silence had made her uneasy; his laughter more so. The darkness obscured his intentions. Without sound of him, Julie was without guidance. She burst into a blaze of anger, accordingly,—to Canardin's added pleasure. He recognized a spirit up to his own. "This is outrageous!" Julie was saying. "See where you have placed me! I little thought this of you, Monsieur Canardin! To put me in peril! But, Monsieur, if you think to frighten me ——"

"You have your pistols, Mademoiselle. And to make them more useful to you—see! I toss mine away." One after the other she heard their splash as he flung them over the wall into the river. "What else would you have?"

This fetched from Julie such a protest of the opposite order as only women permit themselves. For all her bravado of speech, she had been prudently backing to a distance. Here she stopped in her tracks, horror-stricken. "Monsieur!" she cried. "We needed those things for our common protection! How could you! What dangers there may be lurking about us, you little know! However," she ended on a particularly withering note, "I forget what it is to be Monsieur Canardin!"

"There will be annoyances in store," Canardin hopefully conceded.

"In plenty, Monsieur! Be serious, I beg of you! Consider the hour! And where we are! I must ask you to take me back to Paris at once!"

"I thought, Mademoiselle, that *I* was the prisoner."

"Monsieur Canardin!"

To Julie the situation had begun at last really to represent itself for what it was. And at thought of Paris, Julie Lecoigneux, the privileged player of a prank, now that the prank had turned out badly, was at once replaced by Julie Lecoigneux the great personage. In the darkness Canardin was witness to certain telltale wriggles and wrenches. When he was sure she had got the pistol from its holster, he laughed again gently.

"I suppose Monsieur regards these things," Julie said coldly, "with the contempt that comes of over-familiarity. But at least I shall be able to find myself with it, if Monsieur ——"

In the blackness, Julie missed the great heat that leaped into Canardin's face, for she could have aimed no more deadly shot. It took him a long while to answer. But what he said told also.

"You have spoken less about Canardin than you have of yourself, Mademoiselle. As for *my* honor, the next hour may speak for itself."

The bright flush which that fetched upon Julie was likewise lost in the night. Not so her impetuous act. She came to him and reached for his hand and pressed it. "I have been base, Monsieur Canardin! Forgive me! But Monsieur!"—she quickly dropped that high tone. "The 'next *hour?*' Are we so far away as that?" She gave a playful shudder, which he felt through her hand. "Would you—*wouldn't* you consent to start at once?"

"As you will," said Canardin, still hurt. As if his eyes really could penetrate the blackness, he glanced down the road so soon to bring hurrying crowds to meet them. "It is not willingly that I turn my back to a lady, Mademoiselle," he said, "but perhaps you will be more at ease if I walk before." And down the road he started, not, however, without promptly blunting the edge of that biting remark. "The road is rough," he said over his shoulder, "and you will best dodge the stones by watching me find them!"

Julie kept the rebuke for herself, all the same, and smiled as she received still another reminder of her place, for Canardin hit up such a pace

back to Paris as she was hard put to it to maintain. In no great while she was obliged to call out:

"Monsieur! If you *please!* You are in such haste to be rid of me!" She wanted to laugh, and was on the verge of vexatious tears instead, when she came up with him, and puzzled what next to say.

So Canardin spoke for her. "I will not propose, Mademoiselle, that we link arms—for our common protection. But it will do not to stray apart too far. On such a night one need not be ashamed of a little caution."

Thus they went on, side by side, at Julie's own choice of pace,—which soon lagged more and more, as the heavy boots and the weight of her rough garb and accouterments told upon her. Also, something else was telling upon her,—the silence. This was a new sensation to Julie Lecoigneux, not to be courted madly, but to be held off at length, instead, in stiff indifference. At such a time, when a woman has no other means of melting a man, she complains. Usually that is effective. So Mademoiselle burst out:

"Oh, Monsieur, truly you must find me a log or a stone! I am dead!"

He found her better than that, a grassy place

on a little bank beside the way. And moved away!

"Ah, how could you do this! How could you bring me here!" she sighed.

"Because I am Canardin, Mademoiselle. I think of no better answer."

Julie Lecoigneux permitted herself a quiet laugh. Canardin had taken position against the damp black bark of a tree. But a man who allows himself to be nettled by a woman has placed himself in her power,—provided only that she knows what to do with that power.

Canardin piqued this spoiled girl. He proposed a new problem. A man who held himself so utterly independent of every one else, herself in especial, was a stranger to Julie. And by so firmly putting her back into her own world he left her helpless and baffled. Belittled, even! In her way of life he was as much at home as she; his world she could enter only by donning outlandish garb and cutting a ludicrous figure.

Julie began furtively fumbling at the shaggy wig and beard that made a burlesque of her strongest weapon,—her beauty.

"What are you doing, Mademoiselle?" Canardin caught her up at once, which pleased her, because it proved he was watching. "Leave the

horsehair on, if you will. There will be hundreds in search of you. Any minute we shall hear their halloos. In case a mere guard comes up with us first, you will get off without disclosing your identity. You will say you were one of Trevours's company, left behind."

"What will you say, Monsieur?"

Canardin ignored the question. "One moment!" he whispered.

With catlike tread, Canardin was across the road in three strides. He crept there. Once across he stooped, and peered and listened over the rude wall there guarding the road from the river some feet below.

"I hope, Monsieur," said Julie, in a plaintive tone, as he crept back to her side, "there are to be no more ghost stories to-night!"

What Canardin thought he forebore to say: "Also no new additions to the company of ghosts!" Still he spoke nothing, not even the thanks he felt because now it was necessary for them to be closer together in order to be heard!

"What are you thinking, Monsieur Canardin!" Julie whispered, when she could endure his silence no longer. Since he refused the place she made on the bank beside her, she rose and came to his elbow.

All but inaudibly she heard Canardin humming the little tune that always indicated the working of his mind when danger was thickest. "I was only thinking, Mademoiselle," he said finally, "that if they've had the wit to set hounds on our trail, your waiting will not take an hour, after all."

Julie was instantly a different being. "*Hounds!*" the proud girl blazed.

"Not so loud, if you please!"

"'They?'" she disregarded him. "Who are 'they?' Who would do such a thing! Do they actually hunt you with hounds?"

"I fancy," said Canardin, "this time the compliment is not wholly for me. That is probably Morbihan's idea. And not quite so loud, Mademoiselle, I must insist."

At the name, Julie sank back again on the bank, but with a clutch at Canardin's arm as drew him with her at her side, very much melted at last. "Morbihan!" she said under her breath, when she recovered breath at all.

"So you see, Mademoiselle," said Canardin, "what it is that Canardin has got you into!"

Julie thought for a moment. "No, my friend! It is not because of you. I know that man. He would never quit his cups for you at this time

of night. I know his errand! Hounds! He's among his own kind! You'll see how I'll need this pistol! You are sure you heard them?"

"It might have been any one's cur, Mademoiselle. That one was far, far off. Across the river, I'm sure. We must wait to make sure."

"'That one!' Then there have been others? What ears you have!"

"A little while back, it is true—behind us—I heard one. I don't want to alarm you unduly, Mademoiselle Julie. Yet it is as well to face things. Let us go on, in a minute or two. It seems to be the quarter in which you are least expected! And I should prefer to see you among friends."

"We must go back over our steps, Monsieur! To walk forward into such forces as that man will have is madness! They will be too many for any wit, even yours!"

"The way behind us is closed, if you will recall, Mademoiselle," said Canardin quietly. "The hounds are already behind us."

To tell the truth, matters looked dark to him for once. However, he was fairly confident of Julie's chances with Morbihan. That brute, he counted, would be too busy with gloating at

getting her into his hands, to handle her with worse than the insult of his embrace.

"That horrible man!" Julie pressed her hands together. "He is strong—enough to do as he pleases elsewhere. Those at the Palais to-night—he will have them ruined to-morrow! And all because of my mischief!"

"Mine, Mademoiselle."

"It would have been the same, if you had not been there. That man sees Canardin everywhere!"

Canardin laughed lightly. "Some day, Mademoiselle, I must see that we meet—intimately."

"Oh, but you must not, Monsieur! You would ——" Julie stopped herself, as she felt Canardin start at this strange warmth of hers, in his favor. "Can't we hide here till morning?" she hurriedly changed the subject.

"The morning would ask you questions," said Canardin quietly. "And Paris would furnish plenty of answers. It is not alone the safety of your person that is to be considered. Evidently your friends are going to take care of that!"

"You mean, Monsieur Canardin ——? This means, then, that in taking me to safety you

have taken yourself into frightful danger! And you expect me to permit it! Monsieur ——!"

"For the safety of both of us, Mademoiselle, will you kindly hold still? That is asking much of a woman, but in this case ——"

Perhaps it was as well that darkness intervened between the eyes of Julie Lecoigneux and those which Canardin merely turned in her direction at every sound of her voice. As it was, the scent of her hair rose to him, the fragrance of her body, even through its clumsy wrappages, and the breath of her words was on his cheek. As this also proposed a new problem to Canardin, danger might lurk as long as it liked!

So they sat in quiet, this curiously assorted pair, tossed together by their own wayward caprices, the Court beauty and this hunted man. Used to outlandish situations, Canardin thought nothing of it, except that it was wholly delightful. Even Julie found herself accepting it calmly, because something even nearer still to the impossible had happened to her.

In this fantastic pass she had got herself into, facing real danger for the first time in her life —or seeing it faced—the great lady, the professional beauty, the thoughtless maker of mischief, *all* the privileged personages comprehended in

her single person had dropped away. Only the woman remained. Now this woman was excited and pleased to feel herself utterly safe with this man of a strange power. He too had changed in her eyes. The clown of yesterday, who only amused her with his drolleries and daring, to-night, at the Palais and now, had given her strange things to think of,—things that haunted her memory. He seemed the one man in France she could utterly trust, and she waited, with entire faith in his resources, for what he would say.

"There, Mademoiselle," he said at length. "Do you hear it?"

With a shudder and a light pressure on his arm, Julie caught the faint, far baying of a hound,—and said nothing.

"You hear that because the wind, what there is of it, brings it this way. But no wind is taking the least evidence of us to that beast. And the sound is farther away than it was. If it fades still farther in the next ten minutes, it is—so much to the good!"

"Then we may venture home?" she asked, a bit ruefully, it seemed to Canardin, unless something played tricks with his ears.

"I'm afraid that is possible," he laughed back,

in the same key. "At least, I shall have a stratagem to propose. We must wait to make sure. Please listen."

Julie wished she might speak, but obeyed. Even what she thought, she scarcely dared admit to herself, but to put it brutally, this it was: "So, then, it is all over after all. If that is so, this is the very moment for tender things, intimate things! We must be acquainted, now if ever! It would be just like him. I wonder if he will speak."

He did.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "when I said I was sorry for this, I was scarcely trifling, as you thought."

This was promising.

"If I repeated it now, I should be trifling. Because I'm not sorry."

"Nor am I!" said Julie candidly.

"Better wait, Mademoiselle!" said Canardin grimly.

"Yes?" she encouraged.

He waited, and then ventured, "Indeed, I was about to say something. But you would think it absurd."

"We can tell, when you say it," she gave a low laugh.

"Absurd to you, but not to me. To a man like myself there are no absurdities—except one. That is"—he gave her no time to ask what it was—"the hope of such company as yours. Never again shall I be a lonely man, Mademoiselle! Think of that! I shall always have the recollection of this novel experience to take with me. I wanted to know what it was like, and"—he turned to her quizzically—"a man in my position is forced to hurry."

"It is coming!" she thought.

Perhaps in Canardin's own way it did. "And that is why I am not so sorry for your alarms and fatigue, Mademoiselle. Because they will make you remember me."

"I don't believe such reminders ——" Julie started to say. "Hark!" she whispered and stiffened. "What was that?"

"I touched a twig with my foot," Canardin fibbed. He too had heard something.

As all remained quiet, Julie was eager to go on with this novel acquaintance. "I do not frighten easily, Monsieur. Believe that, please. But this is such a punishment! I might have known I should pay for my mischief to-night." She laughed noiselessly. "There were terrible times at the Palais, after you left. Poor Armand

de Lavallais! His Cécile was so disgusted with him! He cut such a figure at his first appearance in Court circles! She tossed him over! But of course, when she learns the facts, she'll come to his side—and save all her venom for me! Surely, Monsieur!" Julie broke off, "I heard something!"

They kept deathly still. But so did the night.

"Every minute I fancy I hear that man!" Julie sighed. "As certain as death he will seek me. And those silly sheep who fled us will hurry to tell where I am, if he meets them."

"Give me your pistols, Mademoiselle," said Canardin. He took them.

"But he will have half of France against us!"

"Most of France, I have found, Mademoiselle," laughed Canardin, "prefers to devote the night to slumber!"

Perhaps it was purposely to shock her that Canardin brought up this reminder of what he was. It seemed to her, nevertheless, that he said it with a strange new bitterness. She laid her hand on his arm and said suddenly:

"Who are you, Canardin!" And then answered the question herself,—"The one honest man in France!"

He only laughed. "No. Only a useless protest, Mademoiselle."

"Always Mademoiselle! Am I worth no confidence!"

"Julie, then? The best I can hope is to set an example, Julie. Perhaps others will follow, to copy it."

"And set things right?"

"What a humbug you'll have me be!" Canardin laughed outright and talked in natural tones, as if caution had ceased to matter. "Whereas I am Canardin, luckiest of men!" he said gayly. "Now certainly that! Thanks to you! Before I had gone too far, Julie, I wanted to make sure what this was like. Now I know! Even though it is the blackest of nights, and that enchanting face of yours is shrouded in horsehair!"

Again Julie started to snatch that away. And again he stayed her.

"Besides, I have seen that face of yours, when you least suspected. And it is not one that is lightly forgotten."

"Isn't it?" said Julie. Somehow this bluffness pleased her.

"And I have come to be a judge of faces."

"Yes, I suppose!" Julie complained.

"In just this way. I see them as none other does. Who would be at pains to seem anything to me—to one so little worth the trouble! I see them as they are, because I am Canardin. Not a single false air to Canardin, because he has nothing to offer. Not the smallest slight—he is not worth even that. Such a one has ceased to be merely a man. He is an admiration. He is a post, a tree, with a pair of eyes."

"Do the eyes never yearn, Monsieur Canardin?" Something of the old mischief had crept into Julie's voice.

"It is their own affair," Canardin swept on. "In a moment we must be going. When I spied over the wall a while ago, I saw a boat tied up at the bank. As soon as it is safe to cover those hundred paces, we drop over the wall. Once out on the water, our trail is lost; not an eye can see us. A half hour's scull, and we are under the Pont du Louvre. It is over. I wonder if you will remember my gratitude."

This shocking ease of escape let Julie down with a jar. How pleasant had been the tingle of all this came to her with the sense that Paris and safety lay but round the corner. Moreover, though they may be fated to come to nothing, a

woman likes to toy with tender themes. So does a man. Canardin conscientiously went on.

"Adieux come hard, dear lady. Some harder than others. But now, be it short or long, my life is enriched! Thanks to you. I speak of these things with the only honest sentiment I possess,—the misgiving that I am a fraud. My part is to laugh, only. And yet, sometimes, it comes over even me that the celebrated divinity in woman is after all a little more solid than a poet's fancy. At least one thing has been set up in creation that men may worship. The homeliest hag has her share of that magic. Some poor man adores her. I envy that man. Sometimes, to be honest, I cease to be an admiration and become a man!" Canardin laughed.

The low laugh ended. Nothing was audible but the lapping of the Seine against its stones. The world seemed disembodied and empty,—until Julie spoke.

"It is a beautiful sentiment, Canardin. But I wonder if it is so satisfying as a hearty embrace."

"I——" Canardin turned and his two arms opened—and remained in that gesture of yearning, of anticipation. And dropped. "On that

point you must consult an authority," he laughed quietly. "I dare not torture myself with such knowledge, Julie. I am an authority only on what it is to be Canardin—when the beautiful pass." He waited, and then slithered off into a lighter key. "What an indignity upon woman that there should be degrees of beauty! They should have it alike. Whereas, it is but once in a lifetime—and only that once provided he is lucky—that a man looks into a face that actually dazzles, that blinds him, so that he scarcely dare look. And looking, his vision fairly swims before the sight. Nothing in that face is to be seen clearly, because too much is there to be seen. It is her eyes! he decides, if he dares to look into them long enough. That smile—it is blinding. It is the tint of her cheek, the curve of her lip, the tossing of her black hair! It is the texture of her skin, the music of her laughter! It is a bombardment of these! It is a flood of them, a cataract of charms! Before such an onslaught a man is swept helpless—and happy. He kisses wisdom adieu. He offers himself to be overwhelmed! Beyond that he asks nothing!"

"Nothing, Canardin?"

"Only the privilege to admire!"

Again Canardin laughed, gently, perhaps a

little dizzy on these unwonted altitudes of seriousness.

"And—you have seen such a face?" Julie asked.

"I—have seen such a face," he mocked her gently. "And I will answer another question, which you want—and fear—to ask. The face is yours. Oh," he now said fully, even hurriedly, "I have been as free as any wild thing—rioting in freedom, above every law. But there is a force that reduces the strongest to bondage. It is the force of a woman's charm. No man is above it. No man can escape it. I knew that, the moment I saw you for the first. And I could surrender the more abjectly, because it mattered so little. As nothing else was permitted me, at least I could think!"

"And what did you think, Monsieur?" Julie murmured.

"You see! To you I consist of words, and there is an end of the matter. To me you are like a star—as wonderful, and as far away. There is another matter ended. That is one of the things I thought. The rest would only amuse you."

"I am not so sure."

"I am. It has taken you to stir me—and you

are the last person on earth to be concerned over that."

"Perhaps, Monsieur"—Julie herself wondered at her own hardihood in words!—"there are forces that a woman, too, cannot escape!"

"Then she must be saved them. There is something that seems to have been forgotten."

"That is ——?"

"That I am Canardin."

Julie had brought her eyes as close as she dared to Canardin's, to read what she could in the darkness. In the daylight he would probably have used fewer words, and his face would have been even more inscrutable. "You have told me something important, Monsieur Canardin," she said. And before he could mock her as he was sure to do, she told him what it was. "That you are a frightfully hungry and lonely man."

Half rising, Canardin answered rapidly, hardly heeding what he said. Perhaps he had scarcely heard Julie. "True! How one craves to be liked. And remembered. Especially that! Even I! Julie, could you find that possible in my case? Could you be so good as to keep me in mind for a little while? Because—*look!*" he said in her ear. "There! Along the wall! In a minute you will see his hat. The boat I spoke

of was full of men. Do as I say. Step into the middle of the road and be walking toward Paris. Here, first—one of your pistols. You may want at least one shot."

He drew her up, trembling like a leaf, and pushed her gently into the road, and sent her off. "Everything depends on your courage now, Julie! Where is all that spirit, that scathing humor, that biting scorn! Did you save it all for Canardin?" he laughed finally in her ear.

"But you ——?" She tried to cling to him.

"Will stay by at least till death—and afterward tell you a real ghost story!"

"Ra-a-a!" came over the wall, at once identifying the source of the roar. A head followed the sound. Ten others followed. In the middle of the road, but standing still, Canardin had kept the spot covered with a pistol. Before he saw the need of a shot, there was a rush past Julie toward himself.

"The beggars were right! She's where they said! That's she! You heard the ninnies! Not a scratch for her, mind! Who jostles her, dies! Here's the jackal we're after!"

With no guide but Morbihan's voice, Canardin swept his pistol hand about, among the scuffling figures in the road, fearful of hitting Julie if he

fired, still doubting the need of a shot, or the good of one, against such numbers, in his own defence. Before he could decide, the night which had been black to his eyes became suddenly soundless to his ears. Fit to split him open, a blade came down across his head from behind him.

"That is not Canardin!" he heard Julie cry, as if from afar off. "It's one of Trevours's captains!"

"Toss him over to the dogs! What's left of him we'll pick up to-morrow!" the voice of Morbihan faded off. And what was afterward said Canardin failed to hear.

In the morning he found himself lying under a bush at the foot of the wall, automatically revived by an occasional wave from the Seine. Or was it the strange dog, with the heavy welts across its back, licking his face? On feeling himself over for injuries, Canardin discovered a frightful gash,—in the iron lining of his hat.

CHAPTER XI

ON returning to Paris, Canardin found certain annoyances awaiting him there. To begin with the lighter ones first, the traitorous Bonbouche had been tossed into prison, the "bank" in the Rue Beauchaine raided, and a small amount of plunder recovered,—what sum Canardin had not prudently removed in advance. As a result of the frightful farce enacted at Versailles, under the eyes of the King, Trevours had been driven from office in disgrace. De Braille himself had felt the sting of rebuke for his laxity. Rumor had it that he had even fled from France, in his remorse. All the work of Morbihan, naturally.

Whatever twinges these things brought to Canardin's conscience, he bore them with his accustomed fortitude. It was something more of an annoyance that the Duc de Morbihan, finding that he had after all brought down the celebrated disturber, took such noisy credit to himself for the feat. But in spite of that Canardin suffered the news of his death to circulate about the capi-

tal without contradiction. Needing a rest in any case, he found it convenient to be dead. More than once before, when it suited his purpose, he had relieved one Paris with the fact of his death,—till it pleased him to relieve another Paris with the fact of his resurrection. Now, moreover, there rested in Canardin's hands an interest transcending every other and calling for the utmost quiet in its working out.

Not Canardin alone was perturbed, but Paris itself was scandalized, and proportionately grateful for a new interest, at the disappearance of Julie Lecoigneux.

For a fortnight Canardin watched for himself, and listened in vain to the Paris gossip for clues. The Château de Grammont, he found, owned to a far greater anguish than Paris, but to an equal ignorance as to the whereabouts of Julie. Finally, however, Canardin thought he caught a gleam, and turned his back on the spiteful stories and on Paris, and himself withdrew,—close upon the absence of the Duc de Morbihan.

In consequence the country round about soon had cause to lament that Paris had given Canardin cause for so much resentment. His followers seemed to have swelled to an army. And their leader, now as high-handed as he had once

been high-minded, seemed to take less careful aim at the objects of his interest. The puzzling thing about him was that money and other material wealth no longer appeared to suit him. One after the other he entered even the dwellings of those well able to refer their spotless honesty to Jehovah Himself. Some of them he entered, at the head of his band, in broad daylight. Invariably he turned everything upside down, invariably he left with his hands empty but himself full of spleen, evidently defrauded of the mysterious thing, whatever it was, that he was after. At length this pillage also ceased, and now the rumor was that Canardin had been driven from France itself.

This persisted until the day when Monsieur de Lavallais—he was now a "De"—received at his new apartments in Paris a certain stranger, weary, woebegone, bedraggled, and terribly frightened. To any one of merely extraordinary penetration this fellow would have brought the news that at last Canardin had hit upon the wanted stratagem. De Lavallais was indeed amused, but not at once enlightened.

"You are Monsieur ——?" he began to the trembling old figure before him.

"I am the town provost of Féricourt, Excel-

lency." Beyond that the poor man was unable to say anything, and only handed De Lavallais a slip of folded paper.

Prepared to be bored or annoyed by a beggar, De Lavallais was electrified instead. The paper read, in the well-remembered hand of Canardin:

"This man has captured me. He wants a reputation. Give him one. Above all, notify De Morbihan."

As no inward stir ever broke down De Lavallais's outward caution, he laid the paper on the desk before him, and for safety kept it under the flat of his hand. "Who wrote that?" he asked.

The man was hardly able to speak for excitement. "It was given me," he stuttered, "by Monsieur Canardin himself. I saw him write it."

"That is to say, you saw it written?"

"I have so testified, your Honor. Monsieur Canardin did it with his own hand! And gave it me to bring you!"

"A man, you mean, who said he was Canardin. It is an old trick, my man. You are really the provost of Féricourt? Show me your papers."

In gathering confidence, and as proud as a peacock now, the old fellow drew from his pocket a tattered and soiled commission which seemed to

satisfy De Lavallais, though he grudged to say so.

"And the man pretended to be Canardin?"

"He said you would recognize the handwriting, your Honor!"

Much as he hated to admit it, the scalawag was convincing De Lavallais. Noticing as much, the broken-down provost let loose a thunderbolt. From another pocket he produced a small parcel, wrapped in many folds of thin paper, which he turned over to his examiner. "Monsieur Canardin said he would one day take my head off if I gave it to any but you," he handed out, along with the parcel. "And by my faith, Monsieur, I believe he would do it! There is something about that man ——"

De Lavallais had been unfolding, this while, and now tumbled out of its wrappages, with a surprise that even he was hard put to conceal, a certain green jade ring. With this balanced in his palm, he shot a piercing look at the provost.

"He told me—did Monsieur Canardin—that if you doubted the handwriting, he thought that might convince you."

"There is only one of these," said De Lavallais severely. "And that is in the possession ——"

"Begging your Honor's pardon, that is precisely what Monsieur Canardin warned me you would say. It was in the possession of Mademoiselle Cécile de Gourmont ——"

"De Grammont?" De Lavallais corrected.

"That was the name! And he had been obliged to withdraw it, craving your indulgence, because it had been too freely displayed."

"One moment, Monsieur. Be seated, if you please." As the provost willingly did so, De Lavallais called a secretary, whom he kept waiting while he dashed off a note in his own hand. "Take this at once," he said to his functionary. "Mademoiselle is with the Duchesse des Larmes to-day. If she cannot come in person, ask her to answer at once."

The young secretary vanished, and De Lavallais again addressed himself to the quivering figure waiting on the edge of a chair before him. "You will admit, Monsieur," he said, "this is extraordinary. Let us grant for the moment, however, that you are correct in your assumptions."

This language of insult, which he scarcely understood, delighted the old fellow. "Oh, Monsieur, I assure you ——"

De Lavallais raised his hand. "You are aware that for years Canardin has eluded the most determined pursuit of France."

"That is what he reminded me, Monsieur!" the provost proudly reported.

"Yet his capture has fallen to you! I have no wish to disparage, Monsieur Provost, either your veracity as a man or your ability as an officer. Yet you will see that this is most unexpected."

"Those, your Honor, are the very words Monsieur Canardin put into your mouth when he prepared me to meet you!"

"H'm!" said De Lavallais. It was annoying to have Canardin taking the cleverness right out of his mouth. That fact alone established the absolute authenticity of the provost's capture. "What the devil is he up to!" De Lavallais pondered. Aloud he said, "H'm! Granting, of course, that it is the veritable Canardin you have apprehended, you—still have him? And well guarded?"

"Oh, your Honor, he faithfully promised to remain until I returned! At the very least until then! On his word of honor! He said he wanted to make sure I had carried out his errand, or he'd knock off my damned old block of a head!

And by the Lord Jupiter, your Honor, I believe he'd do it!"

"No doubt," said De Lavallais. "He—didn't, of course, confide to you just what he had in mind in sending you on this errand?"

"Indeed he did, Monsieur. It was extremely good of him. He said it was to give me a reputation. To secure my future."

"That seems to be a hobby of his," De Lavallais admitted, chiefly to himself, with the suspicion of a smile.

"He did say he hoped you might return with me."

"Said that, did he?" De Lavallais was alert at that.

"But I assure you, Excellency, that is unnecessary. You would not, I am sure, take anything away from my glory?"

"Whatever you deserve shall be yours, my good fellow," De Lavallais nodded graciously, the more so because he thought he began to see through Canardin's wiles. "On second thought, I think I had better accompany you."

"But he is my prisoner, your Honor! He said so himself! I am sure Monsieur Canardin meant to see to that himself!"

"Be it so. When can you start, Monsieur?"

"The question, Excellency, is only whenever you choose."

"We can arrange that," De Lavallais cautioned himself against his own rash impulses, "when I have had a reply to my note. In the meantime, would you be good enough to give me some account of how you accomplished this extraordinary capture of Monsieur Canardin?"

"Well, Monsieur,"—the aged provost nervously grasped his hat between his hands, cleared his throat, and leaned still farther and more confidentially forward. "It was this way. I am a modest man, and will not lay it on. It was simple. You see, it was a rainy night, a nasty night. On such a night one craves society. Féricourt is a shockingly orderly place. And the provost is paid in a manner exactly opposite to justice. He should be paid a fee for the order he brings, and not for the occasional thief who is kind enough to visit the town. It is not only a poorly paid duty, it is a lonely duty to be tramping the empty and sleepy streets in the rain. So I drop into the tavern, where I hope some kind soul will buy what I cannot afford for myself,—a warm bite and a drop o' drink. And that is precisely what happens."

A smile, which the provost was too absorbed in his enthusiastic narrative to notice, was spreading on De Lavallais's face.

"For a long while I am left in a corner. The office of provost in Féricourt, Monsieur, has fallen into rust and disrespect. No feats are permitted one, no reputation. That is what Monsieur Canardin was kind enough to observe, on his own account. I saw that man sitting by the fire, extremely modest and retired. He seemed very tired, even sad. But, Monsieur, that man's eyes see all, his ears catch everything. He reads the very heart of a man. In no great while he beckons me to him, where none has deigned to notice me before.

"'Sit down,' he says, so that all observe this extraordinary courtesy to me, the mere provost. 'You are the provost here,' he next says.

"'Yes, Monsieur,' I owned to it. 'How did you guess it?'

"'You look so poor and hungry,' he answers, so kind. 'Will you sup with me?' And while a most excellent fowl is served, and such wine as only our Monsieur Connard alone buys for his table, the gentleman surprises me. 'Have you a convenient jail in the place?' he asks, as if the idea had just occurred to him. He seemed to be

pleased at something of a sudden. 'I'm sure I should prefer it to this,' he says. With that, the landlord —— To cut it all short, Monsieur, a terrible fight ensues, which would have spoiled my supper, but for a startling occurrence. The gentleman starts up with a pistol in each hand. Where they came from the Lord only knows. And he has only to say, very quiet-like, 'I should be sorry to take advantage of you, gentlemen. But I happen to be Monsieur Canardin,' and the place is cleared as if by magic. Indeed, your Excellency, in order to obtain witnesses all in due form, as he was kind enough to explain, he was obliged to go out in the rain and drive some of them in again, at the point of his pistol, with their eyes popping out of their head. I give you my word, your Honor, I was myself in something of a quiver,—from delight, you understand, at the great good fortune which had come upon me."

"I begin to understand," said Monsieur de Lavallais with a smile.

"'But, Monsieur Canardin!' I said. 'I have nothing against you!'

"'One moment,' said he, and puts a pewter saltcellar into his pocket. 'There,' says he. 'It's not the worth o' the thing, but the idea.

They're always wanting to put that on my tail, and I can't have it. I don't know how many of those things I have had to put out of harm's way. Now, then, Monsieur Provost!' And will you believe it, that man makes a speech to those half dozen loafers hiding behind tables and settles, as much in my favor as if he'd known me for life. 'Now, then, Monsieur Provost,' he comes to an end. 'You have captured Canardin. As it is a bad night, I hope it is not far to the jail. To make sure that you are properly rewarded, I'll attend to that myself. Here is your fee.' He pulls out of his pocket a coin of gold fit to dazzle the king. There it is." Monsieur the Provost proudly wrenched the thing from his wallet in proof.

"'As these gentlemen have assisted you in my arrest, they also deserve something,' says Monsieur Canardin, and tosses them a handful of silver. 'Might I ask,' he winds up, 'as a favor,' he says most graciously, 'that in return you will go about and spread the news of my capture at the hands of this gallant gentleman, your provost?' And as they are only too eager for an excuse to leave, without the appearance of being impolite, they go in a hurry. He pays his bill with another gold coin, all in a manner so hand-

some that one is forced to admire such a man. 'Now, Monsieur, I am at your service,' he says to me. What was my mortification, your Honor," the provost wound up, more confidentially still, "that we should be kept waiting an hour in the rain till I could get the jail opened for his accommodation. Yet in the politest manner in the world he dismissed me when I showed him to his cell. And though I waited about to see if there were anything else I could do for him, he flung himself down on the hard boards, and went to sleep like a child. And there he is."

"H'm!" said Monsieur de Lavallais, swinging about as if to study the matter against the sky through a window, but really to hide his features. "I suppose your gallant and truly remarkable capture created some excitement?"

"There's those in Féricourt that don't yet believe it. But, Monsieur, there he is!"

"H'm!" said De Lavallais, to cover another thought in his head: "What the devil was that move for?" While he was studying that question, the breathless secretary returned with a scented missive, which De Lavallais took and tore open with even more than his customary eagerness.

"Armand, you jewel!" it ran. "I was afraid

to tell you I had lost that ring! Where did you find it? And when will you bring it?"

De Lavallais turned to the old provost, still with a smile, but with more respect on his face. The smile was at thought of the amusement of Paris when he should spread this news,—or at least this story. "You say, Monsieur Provost, that Monsieur Canardin particularly wanted to see me?"

The old fellow fumbled his hat in a bit of embarrassment. "Well, your Honor, he did say as much. I put that in to impress you. What he said was that he knew you'd be glad to hear the news. And so might this here Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle ——"

"Mademoiselle de Grammont?"

"The same. But in particular, your Honor, in particular, he seemed anxious for the news to get to the Duc de Morbihan. He thought you might get it to him. He said—I'll tell you exactly what he said."

The provost leaned across the desk and whispered to De Lavallais that which clarified a mystery which should have been clear to him from the beginning.

"He said, 'If *this* doesn't fetch that hell-hound out of his hiding, I'll complain to the King!'

It don't exactly sound like language meant for a Duc. But I feel certain, your Excellency, it wasn't meant for you."

"When did this happen?" De Lavallais was moved to action.

"Night before last."

"The news has spread?"

"All over. Like lightning. But there's those that don't believe it! And there he is! Right where I put him!"

"Come with me," said De Lavallais, rising abruptly. "A man who has accomplished what you have done deserves to be suitably recognized. I must introduce you to a bit of society. You shall have your reputation. Monsieur Canardin's command must not be ignored. I want the Duchesse des Larmes and Mademoiselle de Grammont to hear your story. Etienne," he turned to his secretary, "procure a coach for myself and the provost."

"Lor', your Honor!" the provost shivered anew. "What language shall I speak to a duchesse!"

"The language, Monsieur, of the captor of Canardin."

CHAPTER XII

BY the hardest of traveling it was a day's journey to Féricourt, and much can happen in the course of a day. The accumulation of fatigue, for example. As De Lavallais knew, Cécile had no sooner heard the provost's account than she commanded an instant errand to Féricourt. As the journey was formidable and the day well spent, he was indeed able to postpone it until the following morning. Her anxiety then, at the start, was boundless, and it gathered momentum along the way.

"They'll have his head off before we get there!" she complained at every mile.

In vain De Lavallais upheld the formalities of the law against such indignities of haste.

"If Morbihan gets there ahead of us, you know very well what will happen! He carries a King's mandate for that express purpose. And with or without that, he would act as he pleased. And let the consequences take care of themselves."

"He is at least smoked out of his hiding, my own."

"Thanks to Canardin," she retorted. "And perhaps at Canardin's own expense. Think of that, my dear Armand."

As there was no appeasing the imperious lady on that score, De Lavallais thought of something else. "Perhaps we may drag some news of Julie out of your friend Morbihan. If we are fortunate enough to see him."

The effect of that was electrical. De Lavallais received a smart clip on his shoulder. "Armand! I am utterly surprised that you have not seen it before!"

"Seen what, my dear?"

"Not even now do you see it! That that has been Canardin's purpose in all this rigmarole!"

Inasmuch as Cécile herself had but just caught the point, De Lavallais would have said something regarding the injustice of this rebuke, but that he was learning the ways of women.

At Féricourt Cécile laid prompt claim not only to the privileges of a De Grammont but of a woman. In no time she had herself, her duenna, and her retinue established at the inn. In no time further she had herself driven to the dingy little building set aside as a jail. About it was gathered a crowd composed of the population of Féricourt and the entire countryside for miles

about. With difficulty a way was made for Cécile's coach, and the already hysterical excitement of the crowd was hoist to a still higher pitch at the scene which ensued when she stopped and opened her door.

From the barred portal of the little jail a burly man, broad and swarthy, and of such rank that the mob automatically parted before him, was issuing as if to meet her. Seeing Cécile and the somewhat astonished De Lavallais beside her, this worthy lifted his hat, swept her a magnificent obeisance, and then burst into an uproarious guffaw.

"Morbihan!" she cried, so that every one gasped at his identity. "You here! What have you done with that man?"

For a moment Morbihan could not answer for laughing. "Your—your Canardin is past," he choked out, "past all worries! Even yours, my dear Cécile!" And his laughter began again.

Cécile swept down from the coach and blazed straight toward him, as the crowd fell back in a new direction. He barred her way. "Let me in," she flared up at him. "Where is he?"

Morbihan stepped aside, motioned her on with a flourish of his hat, and only halted further

laughter to say, "Proceed, Mademoiselle. Go in. See for yourself."

"Armand!" Cécile summoned her faithful. "Support me." And Armand obeyed. "As for you, Monsieur!" Cécile turned upon Morbihan again. "In one hour you will attend me at the inn. It is not an invitation, Monsieur le Duc; it is a command." And she swept into the little building.

In a little room near the entrance a judge was holding session in the manner of an inquest, now evidently nearly finished. One or two last quaking witnesses remained to be examined; those who had gone before were huddled about on old benches, their faces filled with fright. The Judge seemed more angry than otherwise disturbed, so indignant, in fact, that he suffered Cécile to enter and listen without a challenge. Verily indignant, she thought, at this palpable misuse of the law.

"No one entered this building! No one left it! No one saw any one enter or leave it! That is the burden of your testimony!" the Judge was declaiming at the terror-stricken group, evidently charged with the oversight of their distinguished prisoner. "All the same, some one entered, and some one left. You all know what happened.

Yet you are shielding the guilty party! That is perjury! I am out of patience with you! Before I have done with you, you yourselves shall all be prisoners! Be sure then that if the law itself cannot find out your guilt, a just God will search out your sin! Canardin's blood is on your heads!"

"What is it, if you please, Monsieur Judge?" Cécile spoke out, being unable to contain herself. "May I be suffered to know what has happened, having the interest of France at heart?"

"Mademoiselle!" The Judge was only too glad to call to witness to his just cause for indignation this tutored person from the larger world. "Justice this day has suffered a grievous affront here. One such as will bring a reproach upon all France."

"Yes, yes?" Cécile questioned impatiently.

"We had here a celebrated criminal."

"I know!"

"The great Canardin!"

"Yes, yes! Proceed, Monsieur!"

But the pomposities of a country jurist were not to be shortened by any woman's impatience. "All France has laid claim to his person. On the soundest charges. The law had a right to him. We had the proud privilege of surrender-

ing his living person to the proper authorities. Now, with what excuse we may offer, that privilege is denied us. Something dreadful has happened. Yet, as you heard, 'no one has entered, no one has left this building; no one has seen any other enter or leave it!' What would you!" The excellent fellow stopped, his eloquence exhausted.

"You, Jacques Gonfleur!" he began on a new witness. "You too, I suppose, saw no one enter here?"

"Yes, sir. No, sir."

"What do you mean, wretch?"

"To be exact, sir, I saw the charwoman enter, sir."

"The charwoman, indeed! And saw her depart, no doubt!" The Judge was now sarcastic, for the benefit of his distinguished listener.

"Yes, sir. I saw her depart."

"You see"—he turned to Cécile—"I can get nothing out of them!"

"Is it possible, Monsieur," Cécile ventured the observation, "that these good people have been—let us say, intimidated—by some one of influence or wealth, who had a private grievance against your celebrated prisoner?"

"That, Mademoiselle, is only too possible!"

The Judge glared at his victims, whose uneasiness betrayed much to Cécile.

She rose in agitation and would have left to seek consolation of Armand, and the Lord knows what else of Morbihan, when a thought stopped her. "Has any one appeared, Monsieur, to claim the body?" she asked, in a voice scarcely audible.

"Who would have ventured such an impertinence!" the Judge thundered.

"I was going to claim it myself, Monsieur," said Cécile freezingly.

"Claim it?" The Judge could scarcely believe his ears. "Evidently you have not heard, Mademoiselle. It is gone. We have it not. And yet as I say, not a bolt has been moved; not a bar is broken; no one has entered or left. This was but an hour ago. An hour ago that man was here, alive. He ate. He was heard to curse the food. To-morrow we were to deliver him to the hands of justice, in due course. Immortal glory would have rested on this province. Now ——"

"Come, Cécile! Be away from here at once!" she heard Armand's voice in her ear, since he had followed her. As nothing else would budge her, he seized her arm. "This fool is only spouting. Come! The provost has just taken me to his cell.

I've seen how it was done. You wouldn't believe it! Fiendishly clever!"

"I can easily believe it!" Cécile shot out, ready with much more for her friend Morbihan, until she caught De Lavallais laughing.

By now he had got her out into the corridor, and very soon had her hurried into another door, —to the jailer's office, now fortunately unoccupied. Before De Lavallais could close the door, however, a procession of two passed by, consisting of the tottering old provost and a thing even more tottering wrapped in the great-coat of Canardin. A moment more the occupant of the great-coat had broken away from the provost and darted into the room containing the interested Armand and Cécile.

"Go 'way, M'sieu! Go 'way!" it said to Armand.

He left, laughing almost with Morbihan's energy. And Cécile found herself alone with the great bulk of a plump charwoman, bearing nothing upon her person save Canardin's thoughtful great-coat, and nothing in her hand save one of his golden coins.

"He take my mop! He take my pail! He take everything I got! And leave me like this!" the hysterics began, as Cécile closed the door

upon a story that loosed in her much more laughter than the bare story prompted.

A roar from the crowd outside marked the spread of the story outside of the building. The Judge himself, it may be assumed, heard it in time, but whether with the same measure of appreciation, it may be doubted.

Even Morbihan himself called, and was received at the inn with better grace than would have been prognosticated from the atmosphere of an hour before. The man could be jaunty and affable, when it suited his fancy, and the penitence he pretended did something to soften Cécile—after her first demand:

"Young man, what have you done with my cousin Julie?"

"Mademoiselle Julie is with my sister Agnes —not far from here, by the way—nursing a pretty set of nerves."

"The idea of spiriting her away, with not a word from either one of you!"

"The little lady had been going at a pretty gay pace. There's no holding her, as you know well enough. She needed a firm hand, a rest, and utter quiet. And she's had them all,—as you were not able to supply them yourself, my dear Cécile."

"With you about! I wonder!"

"It does seem the only way I can fix her attention on my poor deserts," the smooth devil laughed with a deceiving modesty. "Agnes will bring her to you soon, if I can't persuade the lady to stay."

As the idea of Julie's coming to final rest in the house of Morbihan, so soon as the Duc should reform himself, or Julie should perform that service for him, had never been especially abhorrent to Cécile, this promise contented her, and she let the Duc go, with his parting shot at her sudden sentimental interest in personages like provosts, charwomen, and Canardin.

It was not until the following day that the Duc's glib prescription for Julie's nerves was discovered to have had sundry poisonous ingredients in it. To Cécile's considerable astonishment, when she drove home next day to Meaux, Julie was there before her, already returned, with two chirurgeons slightly more skilful than De Morbihan in attendance upon her, and with a vehement yearning for rest nowhere but in Cécile's embrace.

Till late that night she kept Cécile choking for breath, so close the poor girl clung to her, and shaken with wonder, for the physicians them-

selves had forbidden further questions and answers, after the first one that astounded Cécile so greatly.

"Why, my child! How did you get here?"

"Monsieur—Monsieur Canardin brought me."

"Monsieur *Canardin!*"

There the physicians had cut things short. "She's in a delirium," they said. And not for days was Julie to be permitted or persuaded to tell anything further.

CHAPTER XIII

THOUGH consumed with feminine curiosity, Cécile scrupulously followed injunctions left by the medical men. Quiet above all having been enjoined for Julie, she saw that there was quiet. The name of Canardin was never mentioned. For that matter, France itself heard little from Canardin. The usual accounts of his death got abroad. These also Cécile suppressed. As he had died often before, no one put much faith in the new reports. The peasant who boasted, as usual, of having seen Canardin's ghost on the lonely night highway was treated to laughter. Military circles freshly congratulated themselves on having made France at last too hot for him. Or if it were not that yet, it would be, so soon as the Duc de Morbihan perfected his plans. If coaches still were stopped on the road, it was never in broad daylight, as in Canardin's heyday, but at night, in lonely spots, and clearly the work of some impostor. All that rifling of guardhouses, with which Canardin had

been wont to give playful exercise to his virtuosity, had ceased. Robbers now began to be caught, whereas, it was remembered, that happened infrequently in the case of Canardin. These things lent color to the growing belief that Canardin had left the country at last.

To one person at least this came as a disappointment. "It is a positive grief to me! I don't mind saying I had my heart set on Armand's taking him. It would have meant so much to his career."

This confession came from Cécile de Grammont one morning, timidly, at breakfast hour. She ventured it because she saw that something or other had begun to amuse her visitor. Seeing the amusement deepen at that, she ventured still further, defiantly:

"Nevertheless, Julie, do you know, I once had my own notions of winning over that extraordinary man. The fact is"—she blushed a bit—"I have those notions still. You needn't smile, you little mischief! You once amused yourself in the same fashion. And where that headlong daring of yours availed nothing, I suppose I ought to learn better. Yet you know, my dear"—Cécile was watching her closely—"such a man cannot be wholly evil!"

"You really think so?" Julie asked demurely, devoting herself to her fruit.

"Oh, I'm sure of it!" Cécile was the more positive, because it began to look safe to open a long-neglected topic. "The grace, the dash, the rollicking humor of the man! Born anything but a bourgeois, you very well know what that man would have become!"

"Yes," said Julie. "I have thought so myself."

"*You?* Who wanted once to see him hanged! And wagered his capture! You chased him, didn't you, only to find that he is—Canardin! I wonder"—Cécile peeped sheepishly over her chocolate cup as she said it—"I wonder if he's never to be tamed."

"Armand says never," Julie pronounced, as if that settled it.

"In any case he seems to have vanished," Cécile gayly agreed, still watching the effect of her words, and was puzzled at Julie's mischievous smile.

Three mornings later she was even more puzzled, and a little captivated, to find by her lone place at the table a bunch of wild flowers and a card among them on which was written:

CANARDIN.

Nor did she lay this up as a joke of the prankish Julie's, as was her first thought, for the bundle of wild blooms, as she handled it, presently discharged a certain green jade ring, which she had lost again, or missed, some time before. She hid them quickly, ring, card, flowers and all, on hearing Julie's tread on the stair. Fancy a woman, however, keeping such a matter to herself very long!

She kept it till evening,—no longer. That evening, as air was one of the medicaments prescribed for Julie, the two of them strolled the lawns about the château. In the locusts and lindens above their pretty heads, the first birds of spring chattered over the feasts of the day. A new season of green and graceful slopes, of flowers and fruit—for those who might own them —was opening with all those mysterious intimations that gladden something primeval in the heart of man. Creation itself is then in love with the earth, and mothers it tenderly, and sees that hushes and warmth surround these young beginnings of growth.

Through this quietude, as they walked, an odd sound intruded from a point far away,—that singularly carrying, strangely penetrating "Ee-e-o-oy" of the peacock which, by Nature's ca-

price, has been made sweet to the ears of his hen.

"I know of no one," Cécile said, "who owns one of those birds about here. Yet I've heard it before, at long intervals."

"A wild bird, I suppose," Julie remarked, glad that her smile was lost in the coming twilight.

"I fancy so," said Cécile. "Come, child!" she tightened an arm about Julie's waist. "It's been so good to see you livened of late. Spring is planting roses in your cheeks. I hope my own are as lucky. There's a peacock of another sort coming to-night. Soon we shall coax one here for you. I fancy it will not be hard!" Another squeeze of the waist. "But, Julie, you're chilled! It's time we went in!"

"Not yet. It's too lovely."

"But lonely! Without some excitement from Canardin!" Cécile laughed and studied the effect of that.

As there was none, she tried another effort. "On my last visit to Paris I saw an old flame of yours."

"Indeed? They all seem old. Which one?"

"Achille de Morbihan."

"That man?"

The effect had come—or part of it. "Don't,

my love," Cécile laughed. "I believe you've fashioned that man to be whatever he is. Wild thing! He owes his rash courses to you. But no, you would encourage that silly De Braille! Pretty and witty he was, I own. But ah, my dear, we older heads are wiser. You see what De Braille has come to, don't you? Disgraced and fled! Why, Julie!" Cécile stopped herself, for the mercurial Julie, on tiptoes the moment before, had taken to weeping convulsively. "Forgive me!" They walked on under the trees for a space longer. "But sometime you will explain to me, Julie?"

Julie nodded.

"Everything?"

Again Julie nodded.

"What upset you so, at the Morbihan place? Tell me, was De Braille there?"

"Oh, don't!" cried Julie.

"There, there! I'm going to make you laugh, instead! Here's an affair of mine, if you please." And Cécile told of Canardin's ring and the flowers, while Julie dutifully laughed. "So, he hasn't gone after all!" Cécile felt encouraged. "And do you know what I believe? Laugh if you like"—Cécile herself was obliged to titter foolishly—"but that man is lonely! Tired of

his wild life! He wants to come into the fold! He's signifying as much!"

"Cécile!" Julie rallied her. "You have that man on your mind!"

"I'm not alone in that, young woman!" And Julie started. "Do you know what you told me when you came here, ill? That Monsieur Canardin had brought you!"

"Did I say that?" cried Julie, in alarm.

"And very much else, my dear. Some of it sweet. But then you were in a delirium. All the same, you are not so viciously hostile to Monsieur Canardin as you pretend to be. You may as well admit it. Come, isn't it so?" Again Cécile's arm tightened its embrace. "Because I want to convert you to my little conspiracy. With your wits in it—— Oh, there goes that thing again!" Cécile broke off. Both drew up in their pace as the odd spell of that peacock's note again gave them a little thrill.

Hardly was it finished when a base imitation from the contrary direction announced the arrival of De Lavallais.

Not without a certain sly smile could Julie watch his air of proprietorship as the excellent fellow turned over his horse to a groom. What thanks had he, what knowledge even, as to the

person and the process by which he had attained his new rank?

"Ah, Armand, make haste!" Cécile, always profuse with her endearments, scarcely could wait to hale him to the supper board and show him the new tokens of Canardin's arrival,—the card, the posies, the well-remembered ring.

A little wearily De Lavallais heard that topic come up again, and set his face to finish it. For half the course of the meal Cécile poured out her "hobby," Armand called it. Surely Armand could find some means of reaching him, of bidding him welcome—there in her own house, if need be!

"It's really Julie's pretty idea," she fibbed. "I'm utterly aghast at the knowledge she has of him."

"They're matters of common gossip," Julie observed.

"So much the better!" Cécile argued. "Be the statesman, not the hangman, Armand! Think what it will mean to you, to go to your King with a loyal servant made out of a dangerous enemy! He wishes it himself! He's shown us as much!"

No lover listens with enthusiasm to his lady's urging of another man's cause. As patiently as

he could De Lavallais heard her through, then tossed his napkin across his lap, touched the tips of his fingers together, and answered her.

"My dear Cécile! It is perfectly true that your Canardin has not left France. There happens to be evidence of that other than your pretty flowers—evidence not so pretty. It may be perfectly true, as you say Julie surmises, that Canardin has got above petty offences. He has left off the petty offences for others that are worse! It is true enough that Canardin has signalized his reappearance—in a manner that official circles all over France must notice!"

Having eyes for each other only, neither Cécile nor Armand marked the deepening pallor in Julie's cheeks.

"I confess," De Lavallais was rolling on, a little captivated by the music of his periods, "there was a time when I sympathized with your pity for Canardin. I have lost patience with him. He has put himself outside every pale. He is no longer a menace to Frenchmen; he is a menace to France. He means to be a revolutionary! He has forgotten his humor. Yesterday he took a step that will arouse all France. I'll make it short. He did me the honor to impersonate Armand de Lavallais. He

flourished a *lettre de cachet,* if you please, indisputably in the King's own hand, but made out in my name, and one"—De Lavallais fetched this out in a very deep voice—"that I never heard of! With that false authority he put himself in command of a company of the King's soldiery. This was at Amiens. He then invaded a court of law, and"—again De Lavallais sank his voice—"arrested the very *judge!*"

Cécile tried to interpose some futile condonation. "It was merely a flourish!" Julie, seeing better, gave a choking little gasp.

"The King will find it hard to condone such courses," De Lavallais sighed.

"Why—why did he do that?" Julie pinched out the words between her set lips.

"Oh," said De Lavallais largely, "your Canardin can always allege a lofty purpose. He's clever at that. On entering the court he declared in a pompous manner that it was high time to purge the judiciary of France. And to set an example, he charged this judge with sitting on a case in which the judge himself was an interested party, and rendering a decision in his own favor!"

"Well!" said Julie, her breath coming fast, her black eyes snapping, greater and rounder

than ever against the deathly pallor of her cheeks. "Well! Wasn't it true?"

"What if it was!" De Lavallais hedged.

"Ah!" Julie sank back in her chair in a great relief. "You said it was true!"

"But think of the enormity, my child!" De Lavallais hammered the cloth with his fist. "The time has gone when it was possible to sentimentalize over Canardin. He has gone too far. It is time to make an end of him. He is wise if he flies the country while there is time. We have positive knowledge that he is ready to range with his band—'purging France' he calls it—from Arras to Marseilles, from Lyons to Bordeaux. All the malcontents in the realm have flocked to him. Canardin has been known to boast that he himself is a society. The boast is becoming the fact. The man is a force. It will take a considerable power of the State to put him down. And that"—Armand leaned back triumphantly—"that is the man you would tame with a few melting speeches!"

Cécile had propped her elbows on the table and buried her face in her hands. It was Julie who came to life and wakened them all. A hot flush had succeeded the pallor on her face. She half rose as she spoke. Her hands gripped together

folds of the cloth. The black ringlets danced to the vigorous tossing of her head. Her white teeth sparkled in the candlelight, as her red lips parted in such a smile as only comes when a woman praises.

"Monsieur de Lavallais," she began in a ringing voice, "I can tell you from a superior knowledge of Monsieur Canardin that he is as good a friend as France ever had. 'Friend' of France? France is the one thing he loves! You think you know his generosity, Monsieur de Lavallais. The new dignity to your very name you owe to a whim of his. I have even more to be grateful for at his hands. I know that man. I amused myself with trailing him. I caught up with him because he let me. And I met a man, Monsieur, whom Nature, if not the King, has made a prince. He has saved my life, he has saved my honor—careless of his own. Two months ago you thought I was delirious"—she said this to Cécile—"when I told you Monsieur Canardin brought me here. That was the fact. He learned where I was. And again he saved me"—this to Armand—"from a peer of France. With Morbihan's sister! I was a virtual prisoner of the Duc's, safe only because Canardin's 'malcontents' peopled the house and gave it its one touch

of propriety. To lure Morbihan away, to give me a chance of escape, he risked the stratagem of imprisonment. He gave it the color he gives to all his high deeds—the color of a jest. It was no jest, Monsieur de Lavallais. In the middle of my chance of escape, Morbihan returned with a posse, fifty to one against us, hemmed in a wood. I am here only because Monsieur Canardin drew the pack away from my hiding place after himself. God knows how he threw them off. He would never tell. Then he brought me, as he said he would, back among friends. Such things in our golden age!" The highly-strung Julie laughed a little hysterically. "Tell me. Does France need purging, Monsieur de Lavallais? That was your sarcasm. *Is* there no beggary? *Are* there no venal courts in France? No, Monsieur de Lavallais, such a man is not to be won over with a few melting speeches. France will be fortunate if all her eloquence—and yours, Monsieur—can win him over."

With wide-open eyes and open mouths, Cécile and Armand heard the girl, watched the spectacle of her animation, saw her drop into a chair, half laughing, half sobbing, under the pressure of feeling. Yet she was the first to speak again, to these still astonished listeners.

"You think us silly women, Armand!" She laid her hand on Cécile's shoulder to mark their partnership. Now she was all animation; the strong feeling, the somber recollections were gone. "Just because you think that, Armand, I'll lay you a wager! What do you say? Remember! I've chased this Canardin before. I know the odds against us. Now, then, Monsieur, the stake is Canardin's life,—for France! If we win, the honor is yours. If we lose, we are the fools you think us. But these are the conditions." Julie was tapping the cloth with a forefinger to mark off her points. "We agree, Cécile and I, to get on his trail. You agree to surround the rendezvous with the protection of the State. And await the result. As it is in the interests of the State, not even Morbihan should object! Monsieur, are you game?"

"'Tis done!" De Lavallais clapped the broad of his palm to the table. With this sealing of the compact, they all relieved themselves of a tension in a burst of hearty laughter. Cécile scarcely could embrace her excited and exciting companion closely enough. A fresh flagon of wine was brought. For half an hour they added one touch or another to this inviting scheme. At the end of that time Julie, with an arch ostenta-

tion, left the other two to themselves, under pretense of going at once to plan her stratagems,—which was, quite literally, her purpose.

It is true that Julie climbed the broad front stair. It is also true that she promptly descended a back one, having paused in her chamber only long enough to gather up a cloak. Like a wraith she stole unobserved from a rear door and crossed the soft lawn, making for a wicket in the wall about the orchard. An owl was complaining there.

"I'm so sorry to keep you waiting!" she exclaimed to some one on the Franceward side of the wicket.

"I could wait forever!" a deep voice returned. "But not the news I have. You'll think it capital. De Braille has been found!"

Julie thought a moment. "Oh," she said. "I'm—I'm so glad." After another hesitation she boldly opened the wicket, stepped close to the shadowy figure and said something, said it with point, with a ring in her voice—was it of impatience only, or was it passion? "Is there not another man who—has found *himself?* And is ready to return to France?"

"I was not aware, dear lady, that Canardin had ever mislaid himself," came the familiar,

taunting, low laugh; but as it was evenly apparent from her silence that Julie had been hurt, Canardin more gently explained, "I like to venture close to your haunts, my dear Julie. But there's one thing we're always forgetting. I'm a wild thing, after all."

"Quite so!" she agreed. "A peacock!"

As Canardin accepted with a laugh even this telling shot, Julie first stamped her foot,—which signified anger and impatience. She then burst into tears,—which meant a hotter impatience, perhaps. Finally she rushed upon Canardin, took his cloak in her grip, and shook it vehemently. And daylight alone could have shown how lovely and crimson she had become, and what was meant by these acts.

"Am I *never* to reach you!" It was incredible, the measure of exasperation she poured into the words. And was it only exasperation?

"I have my little appointed task to do, my dear Julie," Canardin said, no longer laughing.

"I own it was wonderful, it was masterful, what you did with that Judge. But as if you had picked the one way to accomplish such things!"

"I know of no better way—for me."

"I do! At least——" Julie stopped abruptly, and the darkness covered the quick pinch she gave her lips with her pretty fingers, and the sudden new light that came to her wet eyes. As suddenly her vexation vanished, as she instantly gave notice, by linking her arm with his and leading him up and down across the lawn.

"What's this?" Canardin sought to penetrate this new mood in the girl. But three times they doubled on their tracks before she could reduce her inspiration to words.

"I've a new lark for you, Canardin," she put it that way, and laughed. His arm felt an extra pressure, too, such was her delight at having hit upon this certain new approach to him. And while he listened, with a far shrewder understanding than she guessed, she unfolded her pretty scheme. "Now, will you?" it ended.

"H'm!" With that he obliged her to be contented while he took his own turn at steering them in silence up and down across the lawn. "H'm! Armand, dear fellow, to surround us with the mantle of his protection, indeed! Morbihan to welcome me to Court! H'm!" such were Canardin's unspoken reflections. "Are they making use of the girl? She doesn't suspect it, of course, but is it a trap?"

"Well?" The word fell from Julie's lips just halfway between a hope and a fear.

As he kept her pacing at his side, the fear overruled the hope in her. Even to herself her pretty purpose of his reclamation looked hopeless and childish, now that she heard it in so many words. Cage this bold spirit, this eagle, —or vulture, as others would have him? And invite the prisoner to take his caging as a lark!

Nevertheless Julie held out the cage again. "Well?" she repeated in a voice of tempting appeal.

The darkness hid from her how deeply she had touched him. From her tremulous tone he drew everything that she had let slip into it. Once before they had laughed together when she raised this project of his polite remaking, "for his own good." There was no laughing now, at Julie's reason for raising it again. The tremble in her voice had fairly trumpeted the reason, however the night had covered her blushes.

"See how you force me to beg!" she complained.

Canardin at last laughed gently. "It will take a deal of debating," he said. "Every night for a week!"

"I shan't mind!" Her hopes rebounded. "If, every night, you agree!"

Perhaps for the first time in his life Canardin was obliged to falter for words. "It has been sweet, these looks at you—even though it has been always in the darkness."

"Then come into the light!" she cried, so that Canardin stopped still. But so did his tongue.

By all the gods, though it was across a gulf as wide as the world, and was not to last forever, he had liked this coming near and calling to a kindred spirit. This was the end of it. That much was implied. Either he came all the way to her, or he was to come no more.

She waited. Then, suddenly, a patient girl vanished, and Julie Lecoigneux stood before him instead. "It is a new thing for me to plead with a man," she blazed, so that he started. "The offer is still open; the pleading is over. The decision is yours. Darkness or the light; which shall it be, Monsieur Canardin?"

He did his best to laugh again. "That is to say, I am dismissed?"

In her outraged pride she rushed away, but turned at the wicket to hurl at him this: "I have told you, Monsieur, where we shall be, and when,

Cécile and I. You are asked to the rendezvous. It is for you to be there as you please."

Back to the château she fled, and to a night of decided unquiet. On the following day she kept strictly to her chamber. That night, nevertheless, the peacock's call resounded again.

CHAPTER XIV

AND on a certain cool morning a little later that spring the public coach set forth from Lyons for Paris at its regular early hour. Because it was a prosperous line, without much competition, the six bays to its hitch were sleek and frisky, and the coach itself, newly washed and untouched by dust on roads still hardened from recent frosts, shone and glistened in its gorgeous yellow paint, the panels to its doors picked out in purple because it boasted of enjoying the King's own sanction.

The two passengers who alone engaged seats that day within the coach, since a chilly air made riding inside preferable on so long a journey, were a slim young man, a little pale and thoughtful and perhaps eight and twenty, modestly garbed in cinnamon brown, and a man of older appearance in resplendent blue velvet, with laces at his wrists and throat which any woman would have recognized as exquisite. His manner, however, more than his dress, proclaimed him of some rank and dignity. One would have looked at him twice, as a possible reincarnation of Maz-

arin. The pointed beard was slightly heavier, and the mustachios decidedly so, with a rakish air, belonging less to the study or cabinet than to the court of law, or perhaps the field of battle. In age he might have been fifty.

It suited this dignitary, as the coach now rolled along free of the town into the open country, to speak but occasionally to his younger companion of the journey. Indeed he had the carriage of one with large and pressing affairs in mind, who had traveled the route often enough before to take interest in his surroundings only so far as to keep a sharp eye on the various estates along the way, as a means of measuring the rate of their progress. Once he settled back in his seat with an evident satisfaction which he soon explained to his friend.

"Well, my dear fellow! So far we have the world to ourselves?"

What was this gentleman's annoyance, therefore, when, at a mean little village some distance away from Lyons, the coach was halted to accommodate a considerable company of other travelers! The gentleman's annoyance lived very briefly, however, when he caught a better view of them. A lady of some importance, to judge by her retinue of servants and the number of their

boxes, and certainly of striking beauty, was soon firmly established in the body of the coach, along with a lady companion, of even greater beauty than herself. Naturally it would never do to let these ladies ride backward, and immediately the two gentlemen offered the exchange of their own seats which faced forward.

"Oh, Monsieur!" The first lady gave a look of survey over the evident years of the elder gentleman. "I cannot consent to disturb you!"

"Mademoiselle," the distinguished personage answered with a taking smile, "let me insist. It is not the first time I have turned my back upon Paris." And while they all laughed pleasantly at this sally, and before he would suffer the coach to start on, the exchange of seats was made.

On top of the vehicle her ladyship disposed a *maitre d'hotel,* a cockatoo, a lackey, and two maidservants. Indeed they left no room for other passengers, which seemed to give them some concern, especially as her ladyship plainly took the gentlemen themselves to be the intruders.

"I'm sure, my dear Lucille," she said to her companion, "I don't see where any more ——" But after the gentlemen's courtesy, she could not afford to speak her full thought. And in this manner the two sets of passengers, while doing

their best to avoid a too great familiarity, nevertheless surveyed each other furtively now and then.

From Lyons to Paris it is a journey of above three hundred miles, which implies a ride of eight days in a lumbering coach; and at that season of the year, when the weather is capricious and the inns apt to be crowded, the ordeal may be easily prolonged to twice that time. Hence the character of one's company takes on some consequence. And by the looks which the ladies exchanged, it was more than apparent that the slightly elder, while interested in her fellow travelers, was somewhat put out.

For a time she kept up a desultory comment with her friend, on one or the other trifle, and the gentlemen on their own part passed a word or two as they tooled along. So matters proceeded, in the stilted manner customary to fellow passengers unknown to each other. For perhaps an hour they rode thus, when, in turning out for a passing wagon, the coach lurched so deeply in the gutter by the roadside that the distinguished person trod upon the delicate slipper of the lady opposite him,—quite by accident, of course.

"I very humbly crave your pardon, Mademoiselle!" he hastened to say, and was really so

grand in his humility that she could take no offense at it.

"It is of no moment, Monsieur, I assure you," she replied, and resumed the conversation with her companion the more assiduously, to cover the pleasure his conduct had given her. She even wished he might tread on the other slipper, which he did on the next lurch of the coach. Again, of course, he was profuse with his apologies.

"It is nothing, Monsieur. One must expect such mishaps in this form of travel."

This remark was sufficiently general as a complaint against life, and required no reply. The gentleman, however, offered the most courteous and hearty agreement, ending: "If Mademoiselle can forgive the presumption, I would say this must be an unfamiliar experience to her."

At this flattery to her circumstances the lady smiled and, before she was aware she was speaking, had said, "Indeed, Monsieur, it is something of an ordeal. Especially as we are almost certain to be halted by other passengers. In fact, I was assured there would be at least one more of us. But perhaps he has been disappointed."

Monsieur smiled broadly. Was this an elopement? "I would say, Mademoiselle, that the

missing traveler is not the only one disappointed."

Mademoiselle started, then blushed violently, and to cover her unreadiness said the first foolish thing that came to her mind. "Oh, Monsieur, what I mean is that there cannot be too many of us, with the terrible Monsieur Canardin at large and so apt to appear without warning at any time."

The gentleman rallied her further. "Ah, Mademoiselle, from what I have heard of that Monsieur Canardin of yours, he is not the sort to offer affront to any lady."

"I hope you are right, Monsieur," the lady said. "I have heard as much. But I am told he is active in this very neighborhood, and no matter how gallant he may be, it would give me a turn if he should appear too suddenly." With that she bit her unruly tongue, to keep it quiet.

"Have no alarms, I beg you," the gentleman responded as if somewhat hurt. "I should do my best to see that you were not molested."

"Oh, Monsieur, I know——" Mademoiselle said what she could to soothe the injury he evinced, to have his bravery called in question. And for a mile or two nothing further passed between them.

At the end of that distance, however, it was a question which of the two, the lady or the gentleman, the more earnestly desired to renew the conversation. And the gentleman promptly and properly undertook the responsibility.

"Since it appears, Mademoiselle, from the number of your servants and packages, that you are bound for Paris, as I am myself," he said, "would it not be well to avoid an awkward situation? If you can induce yourself to trust me, I will introduce myself. I am the Comte Eugene de Bonnefois."

Mademoiselle was unable to suppress a visible emotion. As an old acquaintance of a former Monsieur de Bonnefois, now some time dead, this announcement took her aback.

"I owe you an explanation," Monsieur le Comte hastened to say. "The title only lately passed to my branch of the family."

"I am honored by your candor, Monsieur le Comte," Mademoiselle brightened, though she was not yet reassured. "And since I can do no less, let me copy your example. I am, in my own right, the Marquise de Beauvais." Which was her delicate way of fixing her unmarried state.

The Comte de Bonnefois bowed low, while the

Marquise seized the opportunity of a quick glance of inquiry at her lady companion.

"And how is the Comtesse, that dear lady?" she next demanded, seeing that something needed to be said.

"I wonder," said De Bonnefois, "if you may not be thinking of some one else. I wish the remark applied to me," he smiled sadly. "There is no Comtesse de Bonnefois. That is why I go to make my devoirs to the King, and implore to be sent on some desperate errand or other, in which"—he sighed and leaned back in his seat—"I may forget my ennui."

"I only trust, Monsieur, your errand will be by no means desperate. These times themselves begin to be desperate. France can ill spare any pillar such as you should be."

"Yes, my lady, it is so, I suppose. The times were never so bad—when peers of the realm are privileged to rifle the estates of their friends, and even imprison those who protest! One never knows where he will meet the assassin. I survive, I take it, because I lead a charmed life. Let me tell you!" De Bonnefois leaned forward. "You will never believe this. But I have even faced the redoubtable Canardin himself and got off scot free!"

"You, Monsieur? Be careful how you trust yourself to that man! I have heard of his outrageous audacity. When will he ever be brought to terms!"

The Comte de Bonnefois leaned back again. "I suppose, Mademoiselle, Monsieur Canardin will have to be endured, like the plague, until he becomes extinct."

"I wish I had your philosophy, Monsieur. Extinction and Canardin seem to be far apart! He is young, and daily grows stronger. Truly it is frightening, the hold he is gaining on the populace. Yet such a man must have extraordinary powers. I cannot believe he is wicked at heart. So much of what he does is right. It is only his way that is ——"

"Shall we say, abrupt?" laughed De Bonnefois.

Perhaps the Marquise de Beauvais spoke a little more warmly than she intended. At any rate De Bonnefois leaned toward her with an odd smile.

"You will pardon me, Madame. But those are strange sentiments from one of your rank. Are they general? I begin to understand the strength you allot to that Canardin!"

"I give you my word, Monsieur," the chal-

lenged lady defended herself, her eyes snapping sincerely enough, "while it would frighten me horribly if we should be stopped on the road by Monsieur Canardin, I am burning to meet that celebrity! Ah, Monsieur, what a pity it would be to see a man of his abilities wasted—broken on the wheel!"

"It would so," said De Bonnefois quietly. "My dear Paul," he addressed his own companion, "if there were only one other such champion, I fancy you yourself might consent to be Canardin!"

As this was said with a good deal of point, and obviously had to do with some topic privy to the gentlemen themselves, both the ladies politely looked away. At which De Bonnefois, of course, recalled himself. "Will you forgive me, Mesdemoiselles! And you, Paul! May I present my own devoted friend, Monsieur de Brillat?"

The Marquise de Beauvais presented the gentlemen to her companion, Mademoiselle Lucille Leconnais. Bows were made, but after that, until luncheon time, the conversation remained where this had brought it, among the small amiabilities. A stop was made at a convenient inn, and though De Bonnefois courte-

ously begged their company at table, the ladies excused themselves to eat in private.

"I do hope, Julie," said Cécile de Grammont, when they were alone, "—though I swear I couldn't help it—I do hope I was not indiscreet in supporting Canardin before that utter stranger. You think I was? Evidently you do," she added, for Julie was barely able to restrain her excited laughter.

"One never can tell in these days, it is true, who's who," Julie, with a laugh, let drop for whatever it was worth to Cécile.

"It's little I care!" that good lady exclaimed. "He saw himself the sense of what I said. Evidently there are others who think as I do in regard to Canardin. The question is, How shall we accommodate Canardin when he joins us! You don't suppose he's taken affright ——"

Here both ladies were obliged to laugh at the entrance of Armand de Lavallais, ludicrous in a straw-colored wig and the general habiliments of a *maitre d'hotel.* "Well!" he exclaimed, "what do you think of him? Have you counted the contents of your pockets?"

"Think of whom? The Comte de Bonnefois?" Cécile ran to him. "He begins to be charming, Armand! Not enough, of course, to give you

alarm. But my dear! What about Canardin? Do you suppose he has got wind of this? And declines to trust us?"

"'The Comte de Bonnefois'!" De Lavallais asked stupidly.

"My dear Cécile!" Julie laughingly embraced her friend. "He's so beautifully taken you in!"

"You mean Monsieur le Comte de ——?"

"Who else!" Armand corroborated. "Ssh! Not so loud! *That is he,* my own! Come! Give over the prank! The excitement is too much for you. See how you tremble!"

CHAPTER XV

CONSIDERING her agitation, Cécile de Grammont exhibited no little courage as they took their places in the coach again, on the resumption of the journey. For some little time she feared to speak, for fear of betraying the quiver in her voice.

Whether or not Canardin guessed the cause of her agitation, he could scarcely help noticing the fact of it, and did his best to set her at her ease. Apparently intent on amusing himself with the situation, he insisted on keeping up the fiction of their pretended identities, and said, when they were comfortably settled again,

"If it is not an intrusion, my dear lady, you interested me greatly this morning with your evident interest in the welfare of France. I have found such interest unusual. Most of us are concerned with our own private pleasures. And I must accuse myself, along with the rest!"

This looked like a promising beginning, but Cécile was still too violently atremble to venture

more than polite assent, and waited for what was to come.

The Comte de Bonnefois went on. "I also meant to make some fitting response to your very kindly sentiments toward that strange man, Canardin. Sentiments with which I have some sympathy. Now, perhaps, you will forgive me if I tell you I think you attach a too great importance to him. Since the death of Colbert—a loss that few of us realize—our factories have gone into a decline. No one makes laces. Industry has disappeared. The French peasant no longer farms; he begs. And goes to jail when he cannot pay his taxes. The nobles oppress him even when he does. Well, such things spread unhappiness. It is not your Canardin that is strong. It is French misery that is mighty. That misery will insist on having a spokesman—if not one man, then another."

"But, Monsieur!" Julie spoke up before she was aware of it. "You will notice, it insists upon having a good one!"

De Bonnefois bowed, as Julie received a reproving glance from Cécile, as much as to say,

"Peace, child! How little you know him! Leave him to me!" To De Bonnefois she said, "I hope you will forgive me, Monsieur, but—you

speak with such evident knowledge—is it possible that you know that extraordinary man?"

"Monsieur Canardin," he laughed, "is a man, I fancy, of few intimates! But I can see that the question of Canardin is perhaps deeper than you imagine. Such a man feels that he has a function to perform—duties to his poorer countrymen that are not lightly laid aside for the pleasures of the salon. Call him perverted if you will, but you will not easily make a lap dog of such rude material!"

"No one wants it, Monsieur!" the proud daughter of the De Grammonts was warming to the argument. "You have supplied me with your own words! How could he not perform those duties of his, if he brought his generous heart and his knowledge of the poor to the King, and then went forth to his work with the full power of the State behind him! Pah!" Cécile suddenly forgot to argue and became a woman. "I have no patience with your friend Canardin! What a loss to France he is, Monsieur!"

De Bonnefois showed himself suitably amused. "If only, Mademoiselle," he said drily, "facts were not so deaf to argument. There is one fact about your protégé that has been overlooked."

"That is, Monsieur?" Cécile demanded.

"He has soiled himself beyond reclaim. And to begin with, he is a man of mean birth."

"What, my friend! Monsieur Canardin belongs to the one aristocracy I can acknowledge—the aristocracy of brains!"

"Would you forgive me again, Mademoiselle, if I reminded you of facts? Heaven's standard—your standard—of men is not yet the standard of France."

"With Molière, an upholsterer's son, by the King's own word the chief adornment of his reign?"

"Monsieur Molière," observed De Bonnefois, "has been wise enough to steal nothing but ideas."

This would have ended the passage in a peal of laughter, but that the Marquise de Beauvais had still a word more. "No, Monsieur le Comte, I am coming to think otherwise of your Canardin. When so much might come of him, it is nothing but a monstrous pride, and a false one, that keeps him out of it!"

"It may be his preference, Mademoiselle. And that too is a fact. He might say it was kind if you made him a Duc, and still like it better to be a little king in his own way. We all have lean-

ings that way, Mademoiselle. Even I. Perhaps you!" De Bonnefois laughed. "When the jeweler sells you false gems, would you not behead him if you dared? Well, that is what Canardin does. Sometimes the method has its merits, I think, when I see (as I have seen) sweet girls robbed, disgraced, by a man who is sleek, substantially placed, and beyond the reach of even reproach." De Bonnefois aimed that especially at Julie, who hastily glanced away.

"Ah, Monsieur!" The pretended Marquise leaned forward, smiling, with her bold stroke. "I believe you yourself are Canardin!"

"I am, Mademoiselle," said De Bonnefois imperturbably. "At heart. Each one of us is. That man, alone in France, has the daring to be himself. And yet you would cure him of that!"

Seeing that he was only immensely amused with this fencing of wits, that he was only mocking her, Cécile, with eyes and hands upraised, fell back in her seat, to indicate that he was hopeless. Nothing could have touched him more. Julie was piqued to notice as much. And De Bonnefois was all the more touched as he himself noticed that.

"Speaking as a man," he said, addressing Cécile, "it seems to me you have yourself over-

looked the strongest argument you have employed."

"And what is that?" Julie interposed.

"The one I have just listened to," De Bonnefois began, and strangely broke off in a wave of his hand to an apparent acquaintance standing at a garden gateway by the wayside—a gesture, it occurred to Cécile, which he had used more than once during the afternoon. "The gentle words of a sweet and lovely woman," he finished.

There Julie exchanged a glance with her Cécile, but nothing came of it, because the Comte de Bonnefois now indeed felt moved to talk. With a searching look, at Cécile, Julie was pleased to observe, he launched volubly into a different strain altogether.

"Strange fancies occur to one on a journey," he said. "Perhaps you will forgive me. It may help to pass the time. It seems to me strange. Perhaps you will enlighten me. I have often been accused of impiety, Mademoiselle. And one never knows when he will be called to account for it. Or how soon," De Bonnefois laughed gently. "To-night, perhaps. One of Canardin's bullets may find me. Yet who would not rage as I do!" He pointed to an elm that, in their rapid passing, looked like a wineglass filled and brimming with

a liquid green. "Such a tree I admire. Probably not as you whose natures are more exquisitely attuned. Enough, only, to turn me melancholy. I notice only that that thing is so beautiful, and that I shall be here such a short while to enjoy it. Perhaps you can tell me. Why should that tree live so much longer than a man? Is it impious to ask that?"

"Then, Monsieur, life is sweet to you?" Julie asked, to her own and to general surprise.

"It has given me much to be grateful for, Mademoiselle," he answered her, as gently as she asked it. "So many lovely sights!" he smiled, till she hurried her gaze away from him.

At which he also turned away, with a sudden drop into indifference, to the less lovely but still respectable scene outside, and fell into such a tribute to the French landscape, forest and pastoral, so full of a lively fancy, so burdened with acute observation, so touched with poetry, that at first Cécile was amazed and fascinated, and then disappointed, while Julie was moved so that she almost sang.

"It is no use!" said Cécile to herself.

"He is touched! He is melting!" said Julie. "But he is proud! He is shy! And he will have his pleasantry with us!"

That night, at another inn, Armand de Lavallais said to his lady, "It is too much! The strain is undoing you! By now you see that he is beyond you! Let me shoot him forthwith, and have done with it!"

"My dear Armand!" said Cécile, with a calm and penetration that won the admiration of Julie. "You would not survive the half of a second, if you tried it! The road is fairly lined with his henchmen! At every rod he nodded to some gardener or peasant, at work beside the road!"

"But you cannot go on with this, if that is the case!"

"Armand, by this time to-morrow I shall have him in hand! He has been vain enough to want to create an impression!"

"Trap that wild hawk with a bit of feminine flattery!"

"You shall see!" Cécile pronounced, meaning that to be final.

"You shall see!" repeated De Lavallais under his breath, for already he was coming to realize that logic was not always triumphant over a De Grammont!

CHAPTER XVI

IN the morning, when their journey was continued, Cécile de Grammont, always proud, and on occasions like this, when she very much wanted her way, inclined to be imperious, was now more than ever annoyed by De Bonnefois's further taste for mockery. He chose to observe a stubborn and settled silence.

"He is as capricious as a woman!" she complained to herself.

Whereas her own taste was for an immediate burst of candor on the part of all of them, opened by herself, perhaps like this:

"Now, my dear Monsieur Canardin, let us drop all this pretense and be sensible!" Probably a dozen times this beginning was ready to slip from the end of her tongue, and a dozen times she faltered before something in the man's eye, which made her feel a strange power that brooked no trifling, not even at the hands of a De Grammont. From time to time De Bonnefois consented to exchange a glance with her; but to a pretty woman, that is the most casual of her rights. And from time to time she made efforts

less candid than she would have liked, to draw him out. He was civil enough in response, yet almost cool. Sometimes she fancied a flicker of amusement crossed his eyes.

"He's thinking it over!" she consoled herself. "We've given him enough to consider, certainly. He looks positively sad, at moments. Bidding his confounded old forests farewell, no doubt!"

For all De Bonnefois's feigned indifference to the ladies within the coach, however, his interest in persons along the wayside appeared to have doubled. Not a vehicle passed but he scanned it with the closest attention, and one or two of them he watched for as long as he could through the window at the rear, beween the interested faces of Cécile and Julie. Now and then he waved a hand or nodded to some lonely worker in a field.

"What is the man laying ready for us!" Cécile thought to herself. Aloud, to De Bonnefois, she said rather pointedly, "You have an astonishing acquaintance, Monsieur le Comte de Bonnefois!"

"I have always tried to be friendly to the poor, Mademoiselle," he answered quietly, with another glance at her from his oddly penetrating eye. "I have a conceited notion that perhaps it helps to keep France in order."

Scarcely had he spoken when Cécile de Gram-

mont made the acquaintance of still another side to her remarkable fellow traveler. Whether she screamed or not she never afterward could remember. But in a flash the dreamy gentleman opposite her was transformed into a man with blazing eyes, his every muscle tense as wire. From apparently nowhere a pistol had appeared in his hand, so swiftly drawn from his pocket that her eye had missed the motion.

In a second or two she had the explanation, as a horseman emerged from the leafy alders shrouding the entrance to a lane. He struck into a gallop, swept into the highroad, and passed close to their coach, not without a long and impudent stare within.

"Ah! Good day, Brideau!" De Bonnefois called to the fellow. "How goes the chase? Shall we soon catch up for a sight of the hounds?"

The rider answered something unintelligible to Cécile, and was speedily away, on the road before them.

"I must ask pardon," said De Bonnefois, as he replaced his weapon. "At first I thought he wore Canardin's livery, but I see it was that of the Duc de Morbihan. In these times, you know, one takes no chances."

Cécile looked sharply, after that dry speech. Her face might still be white, but her wits were about her. "As you say, Monsieur," she herself said drily, "one takes no chances with the great Canardin about!"

Again De Bonnefois turned upon her a long glance of study. "It would afford me the greatest happiness," he said, "to defend Mademoiselle from Canardin. Who knows when the occasion will occur!"

After that, for the remainder of the day, De Bonnefois remained the more silent and the more intently watchful. It is true that when Charlieu was reached, where they were to put up for the night, he once more courteously begged the ladies for the honor of their presence at table, but again they pleaded the fatigue of the journey, with no more relief to themselves than to him.

"Well, my dear!" asked De Lavallais, still in the ill-fitting livery of a major-domo, when he had stowed away the ladies' belongings, and found a minute to be alone with them. "Do you really care to risk more of it? Have you tamed the gentle duckling? We can stop it, you know, whenever you say."

"Armand! Remember your word!"

"But, my dear! The jest may be carried too far! Remember, yourself, who he is. And what have you accomplished with him, pray?"

"Well," said Cécile, with her head thoughtfully on one side, hating to admit her poor success, yet grasping for some justification. "He's vain enough to want to make an impression on us. You should have heard him spout about his wretched trees and hills! Ugh! A hill is only something laborious to walk up. But make no mistake, Armand, he's thoroughly the gentleman. I think we've touched him. Isn't it so, Julie?"

Julie, looking out a window into the night, had not heard.

"It is too much to expect, that he should yield at the first attack, Armand. That is scarcely his way."

"That is his way!" De Lavallais agreed. "As you will soon find! Come! Before anything happens to startle you ——"

"Not a word more, Armand, dear. You forget that I have his ring to flash at him—in case of the worst. You yourself found it"—Cécile taunted him with a naughty smile—"honored at that 'bank' of his, eh, my dear? It is here ——"

As she made that remark, Mademoiselle de

Grammont put her hand into her purse. She finished speaking before she finished her fumbling, for the green jade trinket was gone.

On the following day, when they proceeded, Cécile de Grammont noted another mysterious change in Canardin. A shift further away from her. He maintained an outward calm, it is true. When he was not keeping the usual scrutiny on the passing traffic, he seemed to be wholly occupied with his thoughts, as before. Yet under all this outward calm, Cécile detected a rising excitement. A flush came into his cheeks, a lively light to his eye, and he shifted constantly in his seat.

"Ah!" he once burst forth. "My muscles itch for a stretching! What a place"—he pointed to a rolling expanse of sward beside the way, where a few sheep nibbled the dewy grass of early morning—"what a spot for a tussle! A good, pummeling one!"

It was almost his sole comment of the day. De Bonnefois's companion, or secretary, who, it now struck the ladies, had said not a word this while, caught something of his master's taciturnity, and expressed it in his own way. That is, while he had said nothing with his tongue on the journey, his eyes had been eloquent enough

in compliments to Mademoiselle Julie! He now forbore even those, and studied the traffic on the road with as much interest as his chief. On the whole, it must be admitted, the ladies' scheme for bringing this arch sinner to repentance in the bosom of good society prospered little that day.

And on the next day also, matters passed in much the same fashion, except that now the secretary's lively interest in their surroundings had grown into a very visible excitement. Time and again he attempted some sort of sign, or aside, to the Comte, only to be hushed at once.

In the afternoon, however, De Bonnefois's thoughts, whatever they were, appeared to have come to some conclusion. He laid his taciturnity aside and as suddenly launched into the most extravagant gayety. If, earlier, the beauties of Nature had engaged his fancy, how was it now touched by the beauties of human nature—and to such greater satisfaction on the part of Cécile de Grammont!

"I perceive, Mademoiselle," he said, so that she started quickly, "there is no escape from you!"

"How so, Monsieur!" she was eager enough to catch him up. Julie, at this, also recalled her eyes from their melancholy gaze out the window.

"You see"—De Bonnefois was pointing to a pretty spectacle in an orchard they passed. Under a tree blushing with the buds of spring, a young rustic and a girl had left off husbandry of the soil and turned to much more engaging business. "You see, like that tree, she is blushing at the first words of love. That, at least, will be your own thought. It does you credit. My own idea is different—and less creditable!"

"And that is, Monsieur ——?"

"There is no more peace in the world for that young fellow!" he laughed. "It is over for him! He is done for!"

"Ah, Monsieur!" Cécile brightened willingly with him. This humor of his was more to her liking. "You have recalled something! I believe you remarked it yourself. There is the argument we have never tried on Monsieur Canardin! How stupid of us, Julie!" Cécile clapped her hands.

"That poor, neglected Canardin!" De Bonnefois railed on. "Not a bullet in France can find his heart. Yet if Canardin himself wears a magic against the shaft you have had in your hands all along, then he isn't a man—not even a beast, when the birds themselves twitter of nothing but love!"

Any gentleman of passing qualities who speaks however aimlessly of love to two bewitching women is fairly certain of two willing listeners. Under the circumstances, the Comte de Bonnefois, so-called, was certain of double the usual measure of interest.

"If you plan a rehearsal upon me, Mesdemoiselles," said De Bonnefois, "I shall be more anxious than ever to stretch my muscles—especially those of the legs! And it is five days more to Paris!" he mourned to himself.

"I should have said, Monsieur," Cécile put on her most ravishing smile—"that you were a man totally indifferent to eyes."

"Mademoiselle," said De Bonnefois with a low bow, "I have made that my business in life—the avoidance of eyes!" The point of this brought such a laugh from them all, even to a smile from the secretary, that De Bonnefois was further encouraged. "You have remarked, Mademoiselle, on my understanding of the celebrated Canardin. Permit a confession. The sympathy springs from something I have in common with that man. He too fears only one danger in the world—a woman as pretty as yourselves, if there were one!"

"I should say, Monsieur," Cécile flashed back,

"that your friend Canardin was not in the way of being pursued by woman!" And again this man piqued her interest enormously.

"Well, Mademoiselle," he said, leaning far back again, and with the old dreamy gaze through the window, "from my own experience I should say that is no great pleasure to Canardin!"

Somehow this promising spark had died down again. Yet in a moment, touched perhaps by the look of crushing disappointment he had brought to Cécile's eyes, De Bonnefois revived it again.

"Yet I own," he said, "the hangman will need to hurry, when a lady like yourself disputes his right to that miscreant!"

She burst into tears. "Oh, Monsieur," she cried, "you are so heartless!"

"But I give you my word, Mademoiselle," he fetched her back to good humor again, "I am not for seeing Canardin hanged!" They all laughed at this. "You, Mademoiselle, are the heartless. You want to see him married!"

"If you please, Monsieur!" Cécile protested, through more laughter. "It is serious. I mean it." She looked at her man with such eyes as—would have maddened poor Armand above! And

seemed so bursting to flood out her full thought in speech that De Bonnefois himself was softened.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "it is an honor to me, as a man, to listen to such sentiments toward your friend Canardin. It seems a pity"—De Bonnefois looked away through the window, in the old sadness again—"it seems a pity to crush such utterly lovely hopes as yours. But save yourself from the bitterness of failure."

"Failure, Monsieur?" Cécile gasped excitedly. And the black eyes of Julie widened.

"Failure," he said. "I do not know your friend Canardin. No one does. Perhaps not even Canardin!"

"Then who are you, or himself, to speak of failure!" Cécile interrupted.

"But I can think," De Bonnefois went on unheeding, "of at least two reasons for it."

"Oh, I suppose your Canardin dwells in a realm above love!" Cécile taunted.

"I am not so sure," said De Bonnefois slowly —with a long glance at Julie.

"Well, then! The two reasons!"

De Bonnefois turned his gaze to Cécile—the saddest eyes she had ever looked into. "Where, Mademoiselle"—she could barely hear him—

"where is the woman to throw herself away on a thief? What woman would?"

"Yes, Monsieur?"

"That is the first reason," De Bonnefois was saying. "What woman would? The second reason is stronger. What woman should?"

There Julie did speak. "Because I will tell you!" she blazed, so that the others took attitudes at what she said. "Canardin is not a thief! He's a revolutionary! Armand himself has said so."

Affrighted at her own rash outburst, Julie buried her face against Cécile's shoulder, so that that excellent lady looked in wide wonder from De Bonnefois's averted eyes to the crimson cheeks hiding beside her. And suddenly comprehended much.

Cécile decided that her light missionary effort for the improvement of Monsieur Canardin, by means of the softening influence of woman, had taken a markedly serious turn. That evening, at the end of their third day, the whole course of her life took a turn beyond even the serious. It passed the boundaries of the dramatic. De Bonnefois again had asked the ladies to dinner, and before Cécile had recovered she found that she had accepted.

CHAPTER XVII

THAT evening Canardin, as he removed the stains of travel in the privacy of his apartments in the little hotel where they were to stay for the night, hummed a little tune. If he had a single apparent concern in the world, it was for the excellence of the dinner which was soon to be served. He felt of the napery, he railed at the silver. The flowers he had ordered, it seemed, would never suit him.

His secretary was not so calm as the superior. He said nothing, but paced the floor, wringing his hands, and saying more with his imploring eyes than was possible in speech.

"Be calm, my dear Paul!" Canardin assured him in vain.

"But!" the anguished fellow's gesture seemed to say, "it is too late! We must fly!"

"I am not so sure!" laughed Canardin.

With a despairing shrug, the slighter man, as if forbidden to protest in spite of that protested mutely. "Then you mean to surrender!"

"Paul!" was all that Canardin said, though

he made the other quail before his glance. And the host himself began pacing the floor, though still humming the tune, as he waited for the ladies' knock.

It came, as light as a feather, and they entered. In the cheeks of both of them burned a fever of excitement that heightened the brilliancy of their coloring. The numerous boxes had disgorged their contents by now, and Cécile had wrapped her lighter beauty in a robe as satiny soft as petals of pink. But if one were the rose, the other was as foaming gold wine. Canardin—to drop all nonsense of De Bonnefois and call him that now, for he was young and himself again, all the delicate pencilings as of time removed from his face and mustachios—fairly reeled at sight of the blazing girl, steeled as he was against shocks and surprises. By all the subtle but potent arts that conceal themselves even from those who employ them, she willed to intoxicate and overwhelm him. Her two black eyes, bubbling with a native spirit now fired to a still deadlier essence, seemed to have gathered to themselves all the perils in Canardin's lifetime of light-hearted scorning of peril. He stood there and took this deadly wound to his untamable independence.

Himself bedight in claret, in the best efforts of

a Paris tailor, he hid his thrill at the sight of them in a low bow, as he stepped aside, and then closed the door after them. For a second or two they stopped and surveyed each other.

Then with another slight inclination Canardin said, in his smooth voice: "Welcome, Mademoiselle Cécile de Grammont, and Mademoiselle Julie Lecoigneux!" And at this abrupt descent into the realities, Cécile could not prevent the escape of a chirrup of gay satisfaction.

"This is your place, if you please"—Canardin indicated to Cécile her station at the right of a small round table. "And yours"—he held back, for Julie, the chair at his left. "My friend"—he glanced about in surprise, for the young man Paul had suddenly disappeared through the servants' door—"has felt obliged to excuse himself. I hope you are fond of Brittany oysters, Mesdemoiselles?" Canardin went on smoothly, accustomed to be disturbed by nothing. "They were ordered expressly. I was not sure they would reach us in time, but happily they did. My courier must have hastened at tearing speed to get them here. I know you will pardon a little pride," he laughed, "in the excellence of my organization."

Cécile—for he addressed himself chiefly to her

—was speechless in amazement at his easy transformation.

"It is needless, of course, Mademoiselle," he smiled to Cécile, "to introduce myself." Without the slightest affectation he wore the air of a prince. "Of course I am Canardin. Canardin the ogre. Canardin the cutthroat. Canardin the outlaw." He paused and smiled at the shock this information, now that it came, had really given Cécile. "Perhaps the only surprise between us, Mademoiselle, is that I should have known from the beginning who you are. Before you boarded the coach I knew you would do so," Canardin laughed his low, infectious laugh. "Again, Mademoiselle, the excellence of my organization!" He stole a sly glance at Julie, whose attention to an oyster happened to be acute at that stage. "What is more, Mademoiselle, long before you made it clear yourself, I knew the purpose of your journey. And you made the venture in spite of the risk of meeting Canardin! In spite of the risk I might have brought—if that had been possible! Need I say how that alone has touched me—more than anything else you have done and said? *May* I say that?" He attacked an oyster on his own part, as a means of concealing a twinge of shyness.

As Armand and Julie had been before her, Mademoiselle de Grammont was taken off her feet by the easy dominance of this strange personality.

"I could easily have dropped you along the way, Mademoiselle, wherever I pleased, as I meant to do at one time. Certain embarrassments appeared to lie ahead. For us all. I could, myself, have got away to an easy escape from the trap that has been set for me here." Both Julie and Cécile dropped their forks and raised their eyes at that quiet remark. "But Mademoiselle Julie herself has done me the honor to call me something a trifle better than the first outlaw of France. After all, France bore me and gave me certain duties as a gentleman,—no, not that; as a Frenchman!" Canardin laughed easily.

Cécile and Julie, however, had not yet recovered from his remark about a trap.

Canardin continued in the smooth, mellow voice. "May I remind Mesdemoiselles of the oysters?—So!—To return. I might have escaped, but the strange part of it is, I seemed to have no desire to escape! I leave it to you, Mademoiselle Cécile, what was one to do? It is not often that men like myself are made over. Yet I was will-

ing to have it happen to me this once. These oysters are excellent, don't you find?"

Canardin swallowed another, with a very marked relish. Cécile had yet to touch her first.

He talked cheerfully on. "I have no wish to hurry you, Mesdemoiselles; at the same time one has not all eternity at one's disposal here."

"I wonder if I understood you, Monsieur?" Cécile faltered. "You speak of a trap?"

"No less. This place is surrounded. If you were to venture to the window you would see the dim figures of the nearer pickets. They are under orders to the Duc de Morbihan. The Duc is probably impatient to take me at last. It is a shame that I have kept him waiting so long. However, I am sure he would never consent to spoil a lady's dinner."

Cécile had risen, without waiting to hear that last grim jest. Able neither to move nor to speak clearly, she faltered, "Monsieur! I can't understand! Is it possible!" She and Julie asked each other a single anxious question with their glances. "There was to be a guard, indeed—for our common protection."

"The guard, Mademoiselle, I happen to know, is for my own personal capture. Your friend,

the Duc de Morbihan, had no intention of missing me, with such a chance as this in his way!"

"But, Monsieur! It was expressly understood —— Let me see for myself!" Cécile made a sign of steadying herself for a rush to one of the windows.

Canardin motioned her back in her chair. "I would say, Mademoiselle, that if orders are to be given those men outside, the orders would be more effective, not to say appropriate, if they came from your friend, Monsieur Armand de Lavallais. And by the way, I should despise that gentleman if he were not at the door outside with a dagger in each hand. Let us see."

In three strides of his light tread Canardin was at the door. As he whisked it open the sounds of retreating footsteps echoed down the hall. Unmoved, Canardin closed the door.

"As we were saying," he resumed on taking his seat at the table again, "two days ago I might still have escaped this. There were signs of warning along the way—from the apparent 'peasants' in the fields. Perhaps you noticed? And Morbihan's horseman came by, to make sure of me."

"I saw you exchange signals, Monsieur."

"And you were not afraid?"

"I was not afraid, Monsieur. You gave me no reason."

"I shall be glad to remember that," said Canardin. "That you put faith in me." He sat back a little. "Strange," he observed dreamily, "what trifles serve to give us a stake in each others' lives! A single kind word, one pleasant impression received from any one, and we are that person's friend for life!"

Julie was forgetting to eat. She sat open-eyed and listened—as Cécile also let her hand fall idle by her plate, watching this man with a feverish interest. "And you knew of this two days ago?" her voice quivered as she asked.

"I knew then," Canardin fell upon a last oyster, "of this at the end."

"Was there nothing to do but go on, Monsieur?"

"Nothing else."

"But why, Monsieur?" Cécile might be in a fright, but the elemental woman in her was bent upon having some confession out of him. "Why had you to go on?"

Canardin smiled his comprehension of her womanly ruse. "That," he said, "would have been to disappoint a lady. The soup should be here in a moment," he provokingly warded her

off. "I fear"—he glanced at the scarcely touched plates of both the ladies—"you are being poorly entertained."

"Why had you to go on, Monsieur?" Cécile persisted. "Having lost all faith in us."

For answer, Canardin turned his eyes upon the lowered and blood-red face of Julie Lecoigneux.

"Lost faith in you? Indeed, Mademoiselle," he turned to Cécile, "at first I did suspect you of being a willing party to the plot. The bait to the trap, shall I say? It was a cowardly thought. I crave your forgiveness for it. For soon enough, as I watched you, I was aware of my mistake. Your purpose was so evident!—so utterly sincere because it was so hopeless. You had set out to save me from Canardin."

Again Canardin laughed his low, musical laugh. Those who heard that disarming laugh were apt to answer it,—as Cécile did, in spite of herself. "Well," said Canardin, "my curiosity was irresistible. I wanted to know what it would be like to be saved from Canardin. My secretary objected. But I felt obliged to go on."

"And see where my foolish purpose has carried you!" Cécile brought out. "After all your goodness to Armand and me!"

Canardin now laughed heartily at that. "I

think, Mademoiselle de Grammont," he said, "you have hit on the secret of my power—such as it is. It is true that I have had the misfortune to offend a few persons; but so many more feel obliged to me, for some foolish reason." He laid down his soup spoon, for Cécile had been taken again with symptoms of flying to the window.

"Do you suppose I mean to be the cause of your death? Let me give a command!"

Canardin laid an iron hand on her arm. "One of those fools might shoot. And bad shots as they are, you might be hit. Besides"—again the low laughter—"I am fairly well able to take care of myself. Please be seated.—So!—It is not often that a man of my calling may speak with a sweet woman. With your kind permission I should like to make the most of it. Besides, I owe you an explanation. As to why your pretty errand was doomed from the start. Why Canardin is apt to remain Canardin. It is because of this little reception at the end of it. I am not so bitter as to suppose that your friend the Duc de Morbihan speaks for the whole of France, Mademoiselle. I think, only, that he speaks for a larger part of it than you do. You may want to lead me repentant to the gate; but I'm hanged

if I like the welcome Morbihan has ready!" Canardin laughed again.

"We can see to Morbihan!" Cécile de Grammont said decisively.

"I had it in mind," said Canardin drily, "to suggest his reform to you."

Suddenly Canardin leaped to his feet, as the two startled women drew back from him, and paced the floor a raging lion. To Julie herself this scorn was something new, from the inveterate jester, the jaunty juggler of risks and dangers.

"No!" he brought out. "How, after this, Mademoiselle, can you ask me to make friends with that!" He pointed outside. "With the thing I have fought all my life—treachery, cruelty, thin elegance, a cynical indifference to suffering, the fortunate riding down the good! Not even in death will I forgive it! Who have been the robbers of France—the Canardins? Even in robbery, Mademoiselle, I have had to confess myself a hopeless inferior!" Canardin laughed out the biting epigram.

Instantly he recalled himself, and stood before Cécile. "A thousand pardons, Mademoiselle!" he said in a lower key. "This amusing situation is no reproach upon you. And yet, you will ob-

serve, you have not been able to prevent it. You will not be able to stop it. 'After this,' I have said. After this, the Bastille! The rest is easily imagined. Well ——"

He drew himself up; his hands grasped the fall of lace at his breast; his head reared itself haughtily; and though he smiled still, his eyes blazed brightly. "Believe it or not, it is not my life but my work that I hate to lay down. Even your Canardin has his pride. They have called me a thief, an outlaw, a rebel against society. I am something more than that, Mademoiselle. I am a revolt. All France is seething with the forces that have made me. I am strong as I am because I have a thousand Canardins behind me. Let them send me to the galleys, if they will, hang me, break me on the wheel to-morrow. They will raise ten thousand Canardins to take my place. Tell that to Morbihan, Mademoiselle, when he thinks me disposed of."

While the two women watched him, speechless in their distress, yet spellbound, Canardin stepped to the window and spoke the rest as if to himself. "We live short lives, men of my like. But cut it short or long, do we live to no purpose, I wonder? Sometimes I look ahead. I see, then, merit honored regardless of birth. I

see the very starved peasant in the fields given a voice in his own government. I see —— No matter. It still is far off. Perhaps we have hastened it, nevertheless. Even I may have had a part in its beginning. Or is that only my vanity? Pah! ——"

He whisked about in a new—or rather in the old—mood, and approached Cécile. "What a waste of your pretty efforts, Mademoiselle de Grammont! No sooner do I receive your pardon than I am sent where pardon may come a little harder. Your King —— However, if you think it worth while, I confess I was—I am—on the point of surrender. But would you mind if I asked another to receive it?"

For the first time in many minutes Canardin trusted himself to glance at Julie. They let Cécile absorb the whole of what they exchanged in that glance, those two. Then Canardin boldly did more. More than any other he had ever performed, this act called for his courage; but he went to Julie and knelt before her, and raised her hand and was about to kiss it, when "Hark!" he said, and stood to his feet. "Did you hear it?"

Cécile, startled and aroused at last, had half risen from her chair. Julie was wholly out of

her own, when Canardin motioned them both to be still.

From somewhere far away had come the crack of a shot.

"Are—are they beginning, Monsieur?" Cécile whispered.

"Listen, if you please!" Canardin commanded.

More clearly than the other, a second shot rang out. Almost with the sound of it came a cry from Julie, who frankly flung herself upon him. But her anguish dashed itself against a man abruptly changed, who now candidly enough kissed her hands, escorted her back to her place at the table, beckoned the astounded Cécile likewise to her seat, and settled back in his own with a contented sigh.

"As I have remarked more than once before, Mesdemoiselles, I am a humbug. Let me remind you of our dinner. I have, possibly, overdone the fond adieux. The two shots—they are a little signal to me. Somewhat delayed. I began to think it was never to be heard. You see ——" Canardin leaned more comfortably back in his chair. "We are not so badly off, after all. It is true your friend Monsieur le Duc has his guard about us. Farther out, however,

my own men have been assembling. I rather thought I could trust them to be in time. They have had to hurry. But they never yet have failed me. All the same, good ladies, I have sometimes to apologize for those fellows of mine. They are honest enough, but at times they are inclined to be hasty. If you should care to retire ——"

Before the spell of this man, Cécile de Grammont had forgotten everything and was laughing outright. She had long ago gone over to Canardin. Julie, with more than a principle at stake, was a little less at ease. As Canardin signaled with a motion, they listened for a minute. Not a sound was to be heard outside, but so clearly was it the quietude of suspense that Julie bit her lip, watched Canardin narrowly, and laid hold of the table to steady herself. A little more, and he would be gone, to take command and be in the thick of things. Already she herself was calculating the distance to the door.

"So you see, Mademoiselle de Grammont," said Canardin coolly, "there may be a capture tonight, and a little accomplishment for you, in the way of reform. I am sorry to inconvenience your friend. All the same I feel entitled to a word with him. Are you annoyed," he stopped

himself quickly, "by what hangs over?" For Cécile had taken to studying him thoughtfully.

"I am becoming a party to something serious, Monsieur," she said.

"I believe I offered the opportunity of a retirement," said Canardin.

"And I declined it." The haughty girl lifted her head. "All the same, Monsieur, you are taking long strides. Do you see where they lead?"

"That is their own affair."

"It is my affair, Monsieur. I believe"—Cécile narrowed her eyes to a shrewdness, with a smile beginning on her lips—"you spoke of capitulation—even if not to me?"

Canardin fell back from the first genuine defeat he had ever suffered. A broad smile gathered on his face, too, as he saw himself trapped in a new way. "That is true," he admitted.

"He passed his word!" cried Julie Lecoigneux, before whom all things were clearing, rising excitedly.

"Otherwise"—even Cécile rose and was standing over him—"you are bringing on a small war. And things will be beyond all hope of correction then! Very well, Monsieur! Your hand?"

Slowly Canardin was bringing himself to it. But a shout had risen from one of the narrow

streets of the village. Sounds of scuffling became general. Cries arose. Another shot rang out, nearer at hand, then another, and then scores and seeming hundreds.

Canardin leaped to his feet. "*Mademoiselle,* can you forgive ——?" he started to say, listening to the clatter meanwhile.

"Stop it!" Cécile was crying. "You promised!"

There was no mistaking the character of the "difference" in the village round. Hoarse cries, sharp orders were heard. The shots had become a fusillade. So were the curses and roars of rage. The streets rang with the tumult.

"Get into the corners!" Canardin commanded the women. "My men know the room. But fool bullets may stray here."

On his way to a window he seized a sheaf of the roses he had ordered for the table, and waved it aloft in the candlelight,—the signal arranged on in case his men were to retreat to a rendezvous elsewhere. The turmoil only deepened in volume. In the hostelry itself hysteria was rife. Men shouted, women shrieked, there was scurrying of feet, overturning of chairs, the slamming of doors. Some one raised the cry of "Canardin! It is Canardin! Fly for your lives!" Then sud-

denly all in the house itself was still. The place had emptied itself.

At the window he had flung open, though it was now too late, Canardin did and said what he could. "Leave off, my braves!" he shouted, but no one heard. "Stop, you! It's a mistake! And a pity! You were making the sweetest music I ever heard! But hold! The flat of your blades, then! Only lay blows across the broad of their breeches! By heavens, the Duc's beggars are actually fighting!" Canardin forgot himself far enough to laugh. "Go easy, men! They're running!"

As was true, for Morbihan's retainers, outnumbered, were not long in losing all stomach for the mêlée. Every little while, some one of them, with his fill of it, ran away, rubbing a head or nursing a streaming nose. "You, there, Brideau!" Canardin kept shouting. "The butt of your muskets will do. The babies are bawling as it is. That one, there! Put a torch to his coat-tail!" He was succeeding in turning the thing, so he thought, into a farce. And those below willingly helped him. A roar of laughter rose as the din of curses suddenly died. A tumult of jeers broke out instead, as a screaming minion of the Duc de Morbihan tore away to the

river with the tail of his coat a flaming thing in pursuit of him. "That's the way, my hearties!" Canardin encouraged. "Give them your warmest blessing, and let 'em go!" And a whirl of laughter swept down the street in front of the inn, as the jeering pursuit set after the routed troops. The action had been brief and promised to be over in a minute more, when a piteous cry arose in the hall outside the room they were in.

"Canardin! Canardin!" a small and anguished voice intoned. "What have you done with Cécile?"

"Armand!" that lady called back hastily, perhaps to cut him off from making himself a fool. "He has not even kissed my hand."

"Ah, Mademoiselle," said the breathless Canardin, "pardon the oversight! As for you, Lavallais, do you hear?" he sent through the door. "Drop your pistols. I will do the same. It is on the honor of each of us." He laid his own on the table and swung open the door. In rushed De Lavaillais, staring madly about, a bruise across his eye, a slit in his small-clothes.

"My poor fellow!" Canardin welcomed him. "I wondered! But this settles it! You alone made that battle!"

"There will be others to follow, my friend!"

the angry man snapped back. "This is one step too far! Come, Cécile! While there is time! They have taken Morbihan! The impudent wretches are bringing him here to their chief!"

Canardin started, then laughed. "I could not forego it, Mademoiselle!" he turned to Cécile, noticing as he did so, with something of a shock, that Julie was gone. "Do you mind?"

"Morbihan will have something to say to this!" De Lavallais threatened.

"Oh, Monsieur!" Cécile tried to face it out for him, "if only you have not carried your jest too far!"

"*Jest?*" stormed De Lavallais. "Flouting the army of France a jest? Come, Cécile, this is no place for us!" He took her arm.

And she took it away from him, with decision. "Monsieur de Lavallais!" she cried. "Where is your bargain? Where is your protection to this rendezvous? What value do you set on your word? When I have Monsieur Canardin's promise, I find yours worthless! Fly, if you like!"

It seemed to Canardin time for him to set up a diversion on his part. "Ah," he suddenly bethought himself, "I must pay off the comedians!" And returning to the window, he drew

out a purse and began to scatter its contents to the expectant and now cheering concourse below.

While he was so engaged, the tread of another party sounded through the halls of the inn.

"That's they!" said De Lavallais. "They're escorting him! A pretty price we shall have to pay to Morbihan for this!"

"Leave that man to me," said Cécile, white with indignation, as Lavallais drew up in an attitude of deferential expectancy, prepared for Morbihan's wrath.

"You will be good enough to leave him to me, if you please, Mademoiselle," said Canardin.

CHAPTER XVIII

HATLESS and coatless himself, and plentifully marked with the signs of a tussle, the Duc de Morbihan stepped through the door and came to a halt. Almost nothing remained to him unsullied except his dignity, and even that was ruffled. His eyes blazed, his ebon mustachios bristled, his chin was projected defiantly, he was pale and quivering with rage, and the scars on his cheek from a former encounter reddened into a sinister grin. With a single lofty glance he swept the room. For the faithful obeisance of De Lavallais he had but a nod. For Canardin a stare of all the concentrated rage and hatred in his being.

"Fellow," he choked, "you may amuse yourself now. But no one mistreats like this a peer of France and gets off! You will pay for this with your very bones!"

"Tush, Morbihan!" Canardin blurted, in a healthy scorn of his own. "Always the Duc! Does the man in you never come forward?"

However, as Canardin surveyed the figure before him, something of his perverse prankishness returned to him.

"You have something of a grievance, Morbihan! I grant it! Your wig is askew. Your face is grimed. There's a slit in your cheek and another in your breeches. I can't answer for a Duc, but a man will have satisfaction for that. Come, what do you say! Mademoiselle will retire; and let us settle our differences here, once and for all. This is your moment, and whichever way it goes, France will be able to yawn again. Unhand the gentleman," he commanded of the men who had followed the Duc.

Ruefully they did so, a good deal puzzled at the whim of their chief.

"Two of you be off for the rapiers in my chest," was Canardin's next instruction. "His excellency and myself require a quarter hour of wholesome amusement. Morbihan," Canardin addressed him directly, "you are full of spleen. It is time a little of it was let out of you. I don't mind the favor. Besides, I shall need a little occupation for my mind while talking to you. Mademoiselle," he turned to where De Lavallais and Cécile stood open-mouthed at these proceedings, "you will please retire?"

Mademoiselle Cécile had no such intentions.

"Surely you must see, Mademoiselle, this moment belongs to the Duc and myself!"

Cécile had gone deathly pale, but she stood her ground.

"The presence of a lady will impose a cruel restraint on a Duc!" Canardin pleaded. "Whereas the argument should be full and free between us!"

Cécile shook her head.

"The discussion may run high! We are apt to forget ourselves! It is long postponed!"

If for no reason other than to withhold Canardin from any step more rash or fatal than any he had yet taken, she meant to remain, come what might, to restrain him. Or stop it if it ran to his danger.

"So be it," Canardin shrugged, and forbore to say what he thought,—"when he isn't drunk, he's otherwise protected! After all these years I must let him off." Aloud he ordered his men, "Remove the table and chairs," and they did so.

"Morbihan," said Canardin, "you observe the fresh sand on the floor—as if on purpose?"

The Duc stared at him savagely.

"The lights meet with your approval?"

The Duc maintained his stare.

Canardin's two followers having returned with a sheaf of swords, he laid them over his arm and offered the Duc his choice. "Such weapons are not made for the fashionable mart, you'll find," he recommended them. "The first is as good as the last."

"This will do for a cur!" The Duc snatched one at random.

Canardin tossed the lot to his man while he divested himself of coat and waistcoat and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt. He then coolly picked among the lot of hilts offered him, not without answering the wink of his confident retainer.

"I suppose," said Canardin languidly, bending his choice of blades between his hands, "this poor thing will have to be good enough for a Duc. Begone," he said to his men, and they dragged themselves away as slowly as they dared.

With all his rage in his eye, the Duc snapped his figure into position, and eagerness mingled with his anger. Known far and wide as the best swordsman in France, he might laugh at fear. And here was his chance to finish off at last this pestiferous marauder after all these years of the chase. With a play worthy of his best reputation he opened his attack.

Canardin parried, parried, everlastingly parried,—with his lips as much as his steel.

"Really, Morbihan, this is decent of you!" So he kept up a running fire of remark, in time to the sweeps of his blade. "To give me this opportunity of a chat. For seven years I have trailed you across France. By the lord Jupiter, how you can travel! Only now have I caught up with you." Here a lunge of the Duc's warded away with especial delicacy. "Yet I knew you would some day allow me to even up that beating you gave me at Clermont. You remember it, Morbihan?"

The two men were footing it about like mad. "Are you a dancing master?" The Duc blew the words between his grinding teeth. "Be done with your tricks, clown! Have at me!"

His words had scarcely been spoken when the answer came. The answer was from Canardin's sword, not his lips. Quicker than the Duc's eye could drink it in, it was done. He felt his sword lifted up like a feather, the blade pointing skyward, the hilt across his heart, and locked there by a wrist of steel where his own seemed of lead.

Thus Canardin held him for a second or two, the flat of his own rapier curved rigidly against his enemy's breast, while he said:

"My word, Morbihan, I hate to break in on your devotions! That is probably a prayer for me." Releasing the Duc from this humiliating predicament, he was back on his guard in a flash. "In a moment I may show you another novelty I've learned."

Now blindly infuriated, the Duc lashed out in good earnest. His sword sang as it cut the air, —and cut nothing more.

"I've long been curious, Morbihan, to see your skill," Canardin set up his taunting patter again. "I had heard of it. And good it is, Morbihan. But wanting in finesse. Your friends have spoiled it. They too easily give in to a Duc. My own skill has been gained against men."

It was plain to the nobleman that for all his really considerable art, this man before him was toying with his best efforts. Though the Breton dignitary fought now like a fiend, Canardin brushed aside his every lunge with the strength of a smith and the ease of an orator's gesture.

"Fie, fie, Morbihan!" he burst out at a later stage, "are you really no better than this? And your wind, Morbihan! Perhaps singing is more in your line? Truly, I'm quite disarmed. By your condition if not by your art." And in the

thick of it all, Canardin achieved a magnificent yawn.

Speechless with fury, the Duc replied to it with a roar and a fresh access of energy. "Fight, knave, fight!" he found words at last.

"You really care to go on?" Canardin answered him sweetly. "Don't put yourself out on my account."

Now and then he flicked a fresh slit in Morbihan's sleeve, in proof of a dexterity able to finish the contest when it pleased. It served but to heighten his adversary's madness.

"Leave off the play-acting!" he roared. "My taste runs to fighting!"

Again Canardin's sword spoke for him. It picked a neat gash across the whole front of Morbihan's—shirt. Thus far it was the first serious stroke he had undertaken. Cécile could not repress a light cry, so easily might Canardin's blade have cut deeper. The real skill of it was that it did not.

Morbihan let go an especially vicious lunge, with all his might behind it. "My life or yours, thief!" he cried. "I give no favors and I ask none back in this business!"

"Very well, Duc. Whatever we mince, it will not be words!"

Perhaps Canardin had had his fill of taunting, or had pushed it too far. Or, mayhap, he felt that the old difference at Clermont had been evened. It may be that the joy of contest got into his veins. The artist in him may have risen and called for the exercise of his powers. On the score of manhood alone he owed something of seriousness to his adversary.

Whatever it was, he left off the raillery and became as deadly as he dared. With stroke after stroke he nicked the enemy's body and pricked the enemy's pride. When that too could not be pressed farther in fairness, he slowed up and once more broke into speech.

"Be reasonable, Morbihan. You came here weary. I can't take advantage of that. Some day, when you're fresh, I'll crave the favor of another go. Now for a fitting period to this. Let us see if we can find it," he added under his breath.

And to the gasps of De Lavallais and Cécile the combat did come to a close in the next few seconds. In the most brilliant and daring of all feats of the sword, one of the combatants deliberately caught a thrust from the other,—caught it with his sword. With incredible swiftness of eye and deftness of timing, he let the other's steel

slide almost hilt deep through the fretted hilt of his own blade. Then an iron wrist flew up, the snap of steel was heard, and a broken blade lay upon the floor. The iron wrist belonged to Canardin, the broken blade to the Duc.

For an instant the Duc held up the stump of his sword, trying to realize what had happened. From the stump of steel he looked into the mocking smile of Canardin. It was too much. With a roar like one of his Breton bulls, the poor man, as broken as his weapon, raised the stump in his hand and made a rush for Canardin.

Again Cécile let forth a cry, that tapered off into an exclamation of surprise and wonder. This time there was the snap of a bone, and the Duc de Morbihan lay sprawling on the floor with a broken wrist.

"Morbihan!" Canardin spoke down to him, now panting himself, for he was enraged at last. "I would say the nobleman forgot himself!"

Slowly the fallen and bitterly humbled man on the floor gathered himself into a sitting posture and glared up.

"You will observe, Morbihan," Canardin quickly cooled to his inveterate good nature again, "I carefully spared the right one. One of these days, if you live carefully, you will want

to shake hands with me. I won't have it at present."

The Duc ignored this thrust and feelingly fingered his injury. It was too hard for his like—impossible—to acknowledge the situation.

"Ho, men!" Canardin was calling to his men. "A chair for this excellent man! And a soft one!"

The chair was brought by two men plainly astonished and not a little disgusted to find both fighters alive. The further attentions of Canardin the Duc none too courteously declined, but he suffered De Lavallais to steady him into the seat.

Canardin, one hand employing his rapier as a cane, the other now twirling his moustache, stood watching them, humming a little tune to his thoughts.

While they looked to see what he would do next, the old baffling smile returned, and he stepped toward Cécile,—fumbling in his pockets mysteriously. When he drew forth his hand it contained the familiar ring of green jade, which he offered her with an embarrassed bow. De Lavallais started at sight of it, but with an "Oh!" of gathering comprehension, Cécile took it.

"Mademoiselle," said Canardin, "I felt it proper to relieve you of that—during our journey—before I quite understood. It may have little value longer—since your demand for my surrender. Yet perhaps, as a souvenir ——"

"It shall be priceless!"

"It cannot be that, Mademoiselle," he answered humbly, "until I have told you that I am ashamed of my vanity here. Perhaps, if you knew of what is epitomized in this moment, you might find it in your heart to forgive me. The truth is, I begin to be bored by this sorry business of mine. You have made me feel like a mountebank. Before I am guilty of further follies"—he held out the hilt of his rapier toward her, as Cécile flashed such a smile at De Lavallais as husbands come to know—"will you not deprive me of this!"

In short, the tableau would have come to a pretty conclusion but for a slight diversion.

"Where is he?" a great voice boomed, and three startled persons turned toward a sudden apparition at the door. The resplendent figure of Trevours and twenty of his soldiers stood before them.

The astounded Lavallais was the logical person first to find words. "He? Why, there ——"

He looked about, finally toward the open window whence, a little while before, Canardin had tossed out the purse of coins.

Neatly and sweetly he had let himself down the adjacent waterspout into the night.

CHAPTER XIX

A SHARP feminine cry, between a pair of angry masculine exclamations, burst from the window above as Canardin touched the ground below. He looked up in time to see Cécile de Grammont perform a useful service for him. By reaching the window first, she completely filled it in looking out.

"He's gone!" she pronounced, with what seemed like satisfaction to Canardin. She then performed another service for him. By turning sharply away from the window she bumped into the crowding figures of Lavallais and Trevours. A hasty pardon, and both their heads were looking out.

They looked in time to see Canardin's white shirt flying into the bushes that marked the boundary line of the inn property. While Canardin, in a dark undergarment, hugging the wall, backed and sidled round a corner and—bumped into a waiting man, whose arms instantly encircled him.

"Hush, Monsieur!" quick lips whispered, be-

fore Canardin had time to choke them. "Not a sound; not a whisper! Come with me. Give me your hand."

"Julie!"

"I *beg* you! Hush!"

In the inky blackness a slim hand felt for his arm, slid along his sleeve till it caught the tips of his fingers. It drew him, and he followed, like a blind man. Over the soft turf of the inn yard, in the rear of the structure, he let himself be led in the utter dark and the stillness that the watchers themselves maintained in order to hear him. To shadows deeper still, if that were possible, they slipped over the sod, step by step, scarcely daring to breathe. Round an ell of the inn the guide came to a halt, and Canardin obediently did likewise. How long they stood so Canardin was too absorbed to guess. Long enough, at all events, for him to lift a tiny hand and imprint upon it a noiseless kiss. A pressure returned the greeting.

At last two lips reached up to his ear. "Hundreds of them!" came not so much a whisper as a breathing. "A cordon round the house! Not thirty paces away! Trevours's men. He's been given this last chance to redeem himself. And is savage as a wild boar. Wait!"

Another period of absolute stillness, another kiss of the hand, another returning pressure. The silence itself told its story. The watchers were waiting for him to move. Already Canardin knew they must have found his empty shirt. Within the inn, he knew, Trevours, after not too much bragging and bluster, would be bustling instead.

At length, with her free hand feeling along the wall, Julie led on a dozen paces, and there groped about for something. Next Canardin felt himself pulled down a short flight of stairs, step by step. A latch was opened softly. The door itself he could but imagine being opened for him, and closed behind him.

"Ah!" came a whisper now, not merely a breathing. From the odor of the place, because there was nothing to see, Canardin knew they were in a cellar passage. "Wait till I get some breath!" he heard her whisper. Perhaps a third kiss of her hand helped somewhat to that end, for Canardin's guide now led along this passage toward the interior of the house. Soon he heard the click of another latch. A door opened softly, and through it issued the dim glow of a bed of dying coals on a grill. In the light of them, the lady dropped Canardin's hand, but hers was soon

imprisoned again, for now Canardin caught it. She closed the door as he entered the room and took the swift habitual inventory of his surroundings,—noting the four windows tightly barred by shutters, the shining cutlery and utensils, the legs of mutton depending from the beams, and all the appurtenances of a tavern scullery. This precaution of a moment finished, Canardin very naturally turned to his guide and savior.

Already she had hopped upon the table and was smiling triumphantly down upon him. Perhaps she was aware, even at such a time, of the picture she made, with her head cocked at a saucy angle, as Canardin promptly took inventory of that scene also.

"Oh, thank heaven!" she closed her eyes and breathed, "I could help this much!"

When she opened them Canardin saw they were wet. The next moment they flashed more fire than the flickering coals on the hearth. "We've only a minute to rest. What next, you must decide. They'll search every hole and corner. In the end they must find us here. If we stay. The beastly cowards! Who gave Trevours the sense to get here, with all his men——! Cécile knew what she was saying. They mean to make war on you now, Canardin. That weak-

ling, Armand! He should have foreseen this! No, *I* should have foreseen it!"

"Tut, child. This was bound to come sooner or later."

"No, they would never have caught up with you but for this—but for me! If only we could hide until Cécile has time to intercede! She has power in Paris. And with your promise, you know, maybe ——"

"That does nicely enough for me." Canardin laughed his low laugh. "But do you suppose, my dear, I can let those poor fellows of mine be caught and hanged, one by one? Some of them to-night. Without even a trial! They'll be hunted like dogs!"

"But in a week Cécile can have you pardoned! And then you can get them all off, too!"

"A week? Months! If ever! And if even one of those poor fellows is caught, I am responsible."

"What is there you can do?"

"Join them, of course. Save them. Disperse them for their own good. A last word with you, Julie. I've wanted that. It's why I am here, when my place is out there. My duty as a man is out there!"

"Listen!"

On the floor over their heads they heard the stealthy tramp of feet. The search through the inn had begun. Outside hundreds were probably beating every rod of ground.

"Where can we go?" Julie writhed, rather than turned about in her place, searching the half-lit room for a cupboard, for a haven of any sort, that was not there. "Hide you I must! In a few minutes more they will be down here. They're sure to find the way!"

"In a few minutes more you shall go up and save them the trouble. This has gone too far."

"And you shall ——"

"Step out."

"Very well, Monsieur Canardin!" Julie snapped out the words. "But listen to this. Where you go, I go with you now!"

Canardin laughed for joy of her. But not long did he laugh. The heavy black cloak about her had fallen apart from the throat, and disclosed her in the costume of a boy, with velvet jerkin and breeches, and boots to the knees. Unconscious of this, or else utterly confident before this man, her head was tossed back, her face blazing with what her lips themselves seemed ready to hurl into his apparent stupidity. It was no time to talk. But he happened not to be

stupid, and read what was there. It was not simply a foolishly determined girl before him, but a woman with that claim upon him which it is not in any man, whatever his extremity, to ignore.

"Where you go, I go with you," he was hearing.

He stepped before her and rested his hands on the table at her side.

"Flout me!" she said, doing her best to be the saucy Julie of old. "You have only a minute left to do it. Go on. Laugh!" But her head drooped forward in time to meet the hands that lightly pressed it to his shoulder.

"Julie, dear, it's only a minute for me. The last minute left me, the only one worth living! It's strange! And yet I'm glad. You're saved from tossing away that sweet self of yours on me! Do you remember, I told you, once, that a man had lived if a woman so much as gave him a kindly thought? Well ——"

Up came the curly head with a toss. Two burning eyes looked him over. Two cheeks swept near, till he felt the heat of them. Two lips placed themselves squarely before him, and said it all, in three words: "Here I am!" Her hands came up to his shoulders. "Take me!

Keep me!" Her head fell forward. "Where is your courage, Canardin!" She kissed him. And quickly buried her face in her cloak. "You don't know how," came the smothered words from there. "I'm so glad. It will be so wonderful to teach you!"

There she pushed him from her and might have been Canardin himself for quickness of thinking and resource.

"Now then! Your plans, this instant! You see a way out, of course! For yourself. But now your troubles begin. You've me to think of!"

"Listen, Julie!"

Outside, at that very corner, came noise of flying feet, yells, the scream of a man in fear for his life, and his pleadings.

"Don't, don't! Let me off, and I'll tell! I'm not the one! I know where he went! I'll show you! Let me off, and I'll show you! I swear I will!" A hand probably clapped itself over the weakening lips, or windpipe. The cries died in a gurgle, the footsteps faded away.

"Poor devils!" said Canardin. "That's how it will go with them! To the nearest tree with them!"

Till the last thump of footsteps died away on

the turf they listened. Then Julie stepped quivering down from her perch—not, either, in the quiver of fear. Otherwise than in mere physical presence she was distinctly with Canardin now. "They dare to do that?" she blazed. "I'll fight that myself! I'll be your lieutenant! I'll get you others! Hundreds of them!"

"Hush, please!" Canardin warned.

Another party of searchers could be heard outside, feeling at the barred shutters. Again Julie and Canardin listened without breathing. Finally the party moved away.

"They'll have better luck by daylight," said Canardin grimly. Suddenly he turned to the girl and spoke rapidly. "The time has come. It is hard. Your defiance is adorable. But this is serious. While there is time, go back to Cécile. Adieu, Julie." He held out his hand. "For now."

She drew herself up, for answer.

"I command it. I implore it, then! Another time ——"

"I do not budge," she cut him short. And came to him and grasped his arms. "See here! You're not going to toss away that life of yours, either! Run from this treacherous crew? Be hounded forever by such? My Canardin? We'll

go straight to Paris and beat them on their own ground! Now, think how it's to be done! You supply the wits. Cécile and I will find the rest!"

It was a brave speech—instantly recanted by the speaker. "No, no! My own!" She was in his arms, in a tremble. "Do you hear them? They are too many for you. We must save you from that! You must let us owe you that! I'll go to Cécile. If she takes her stand with me beside you, we'll see how they dare touch you!"

A low laugh interrupted them. Julie turned. A door behind her had opened. A figure stood in the opening, a black silhouette against the light of a lantern in the hands of another figure behind him, with other searchers visible in the rear. In a blind impulse to do something, Julie leaped toward the table and hurled an iron skillet. It crashed with a clang against the wall above the intruder's head. And of a sudden Julie Lecoigneux acquired the cunning of Canardin's outlaw world, as if she had herself been bred in it. One clang had taught her. As fast as she could, she created others. Half a dozen basins stood handy on the table. As if madly and blindly in fear, she flung them all. Canardin, she had noticed

instantly out of the corner of her eye, had vanished. Wherever he was, whatever his movements, they needed the cover of noise. She made it for him.

"Stop, stop!" she recognized the voice of Armand de Lavallais, as he frantically dodged one last pail she tossed at his head. "Be quiet, you numbskull!" The party came in with their lanterns, Cécile the last. "Have you seen him? Was he here?"

"Who?" asked Julie, in as deep a voice as she could muster.

"Canardin," said Lavallais.

"And Mademoiselle Lecoigneux with him, most likely," Cécile added, uselessly enough. For the frightened young boy, as they supposed him to be till the astonished party examined his fallen body with their lanterns, had waited only long enough to hear a reassuring pebble dropped down the chimney, and then had fainted.

CHAPTER XX

THAT night, it is only true to say, marked the end of Canardin once and for all. The correctness of this is in no way affected by the few swift facts that followed. In half an hour strange hands had only partly revived the wilted Julie and borne her up the stair from the scullery. At the top of the flight, however, she came to herself with great despatch, at the sound of high words on the floor still above. Forgetful of a costume apt to stir remark, she tore from the arms of the doctors who bore her and flew to the point where four familiar voices were shouting at once.

In the room where Canardin had but lately entertained Cécile and herself, Trevours was holding court for the guilty who lived, and an inquest over the celebrated quarry he regarded as already as good as dead. Still nursing his broken wrist, Morbihan sat with a contented grin and abetted him.

The Governor of Paris, assured of his dignities

again, declaimed magnificently. "As for that monster Canardin, he dies at the nearest post, the moment I've got him. But as for you, Monsieur de Lavallais"—a thick finger shot out at the mortified Armand—"what shall you have to say, to your friends, to your judge, to your King, to France, when I have stated the charges against you! Not laxity in office alone! A *procureur-général* of France, the recipient of a thousand stolen pistoles, from the notorious Canardin himself! And you, Mademoiselle de Grammont, conniving at his escape! Yet you complain because I have had to arrest you!"

In a word, Trevours was enjoying life. Crimson with indignation, bursting with fury, a thousand blistering replies on her lips, Cécile was helpless against the blast of sound.

The sound ceased with some suddenness, nevertheless. At the precise moment when Trevours cut himself short in the middle of a word, shocked by the sight of Julie Lecoigneux at the open door, a closed one to the rear of him was violently slammed. The jar of it fixed the attention of all five of them on the figure of Canardin, just emerged from his private chamber, in resplendent dress again, and quite unarmed.

"Permit me, ladies and gentlemen," he quietly

spoke into their startled silence. "If I mistake not, one of us here is on the point of making an ass of himself. I hope I am not too late to prevent the scandal. Certain other apologies are due. I have had a weakness for amusement. When that comes to the point of annoyance to my friends, the thing has been overdone. The farce has been over-played. After his excursion to Versailles"—Canardin turned to Trevours—"the Governor of Paris will be the first to agree with me. But a moment ago"—he came up to Cécile—"I committed the very worst of my crimes. I forgot my parole to a lady. Is it too late to make amends?"

"It isn't true!" a cry cut him short, and in all her boyish garb Julie Lecoigneux threw herself into the scene. "It's only his jest! He's giving himself up to save his men from this ——" The rest she expressed in action. Altogether she filled Trevours's thick skull to bursting with novel emotions as she flung herself upon him with flying and vengeful fingers.

What, however, were two mere women against three officials of France, not to think of the considerable army brought there by Trevours? Now that he had obligingly placed himself in their hands, they forthwith arrested Canardin, and

that very night haled their prize to Paris and into the Bastille.

In vain Canardin himself protested on one point. In vain he raised the condition that, in return for saving them further years of the chase, they owed him the favor of amnesty for his willing followers. The Governor of Paris refused to waive his prerogative of hanging whom he pleased, as the law directed. Finding himself so strongly backed by military logic, De Lavallais himself concurred in this. Thus was achieved the end of Canardin.

Yet while there is about military argument that logic and immediacy which delights the masculine mind, there is about feminine illogic a dogged pertinacity which men may well wait long to ridicule. A lady who loves becomes a power that it is well to respect, and Cécile de Grammont herself was a power without the aid of any such emotion as that which fired the bosom of Julie Lecoigneux. Kings cannot withstand them. Not even Louis the Great could hold out against this pair.

It is said that when His Majesty finally had brought from the Bastille into his august presence at Versailles a certain Monsieur Eugene de Bonnefois, he looked long into the proud eyes of

the man who stood before him, and said then, simply, perhaps because the two spirits understood something of each other:

"You-u rascal!"

It is also said that, after His Majesty had listened to the most exhaustive representations in the interest of Monsieur de Bonnefois on the part of the granddaughter of that one-time pillar of the realm, the Maréchal de Grammont, the argument which after all had disposed the King to clemency came from another advocate, and was exceedingly brief.

A certain young lady dight Julie Lecoigneux was also summoned to Versailles to speak a word for Monsieur de Bonnefois. They say that, hearing her last of all, the King asked, wearily:

"Why do *you* ask this man's life?"

And she answered, "Because I love him, Sire" —which is reported to have settled the matter, as was proper.

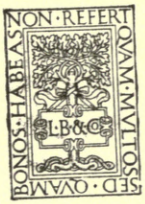
It is this, perhaps, which accounts for certain scandalous rumors that soon affixed themselves forever to the name of Monsieur de Bonnefois. These have it that so soon as his visit to the château of Mademoiselle Cécile de Grammont, whither he had taken his bride on their way to assume by appointment the Governorship of Lor-

raine, even then he had come completely under the thumb of his spirited wife. They say it was utterly beyond belief, the power she exerted over him.

If, for instance, he thieved from her so much as a kiss, and she wanted the property instantly restored to her, she had only to cock on one side her mass of black ringlets and say to him sternly:

"Canardin!"

THE END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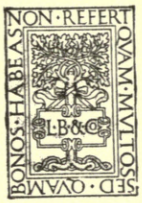
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